

Use of Theatre for Environmental Awareness

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Theatre is a powerful medium for facilitating learning-by-doing in the classroom by establishing an inclusive environment. When a child achieves something on her own, she is able to express herself in her own unique way, in an effort to engage with issues of social life. The definition of drama is to enter events with one's own personal context and connect it to one's imagination and explore this relationship with the real world. We realised this while working on the Environmental Studies (EVS) topic 'Pond in the Classroom'. The role and responsibilities of social and administrative institutions and the residents in the upkeep of the village pond is investigated by the children through role-play.

This is a sample of a plan for class IV, in which the work on the pond as a local water source is being shared. The following points are examined in this work:

1. Recognising the availability of water and its distribution as a basic necessity.
2. Awareness of the need for a pond (water body) in their neighbourhood and its socio-cultural context.

Prior experiences as foundation

Several times in the past, these children were exposed to theatrical games and children know how to construct dramatic events based on minor incidents by improvising and performing local happenings. They can break up short stories into different scenarios and exhibit them as frozen pictures. They have also worked in both small and large groups, a skill which was helpful when working on the theme of ponds.

Action plan

The steps and experiences gathered over several sessions are presented here.

Session 1

What: A review of a source of water in a context.

Why: To educate children about local water supply, as well as the distribution and availability processes,

and to motivate them to work on both and in the process, discover the difficulties in the local social context and the associated problems.

How:

1. Initiate a group conversation, perhaps during circle time, about when we use water, who carries the water to our residence and from where it comes. Make a simple map and picture of it on paper.
2. Have another group discussion with the children about these issues, this time focusing on: Where does the water come from in our homes and why does a particular person from the family go out to bring it?
3. Have an interaction about maps and pictures displayed in the classroom that the children have made.
4. List the sources of water in the village.
5. Highlight 'the pond' in this list and ask the children to talk about it with their family members and residents of the locality to know more.

Results

1. Doubts were cleared by talking with the children and posting the list on the blackboard.
2. Some of the questions were: What is the source of water? The response to this question revealed how some families do not have to transport water from outside since they have a borewell at home, whereas many others collect water from water supply tanks. Many children reported that they received water from a distant source, though this chore was usually done by their mothers and sisters. This gave rise to another discussion. Why was carrying water the responsibility of the mothers and sisters? The answer was that either the father went to work or that, because the mother cooks, she brings in the water most of the time. Such responses gave us an insight into children's perceptions of home, something we can work on in more detail later.

Session 2

What: An awareness of the relationship between the village and its source of water (the pond).

Why: Residents' relationships with the local pond, including their concerns and suggested solutions.

How: Listening to the children talk about the pond and identifying the problems and concerns regarding it.

Finding solutions through theatre

The teacher recounted this story about the pond: There is an old pond in Arnia village that is being contaminated by waste from the surrounding area, and the pond is shrinking. Because of this, the cattle are not getting enough water to drink, and the fields are parched. Seeing the condition of the pond, a lady named Sophia complained to the *Sarpanch* many times, saying that the pond should be cleaned, and a solution should also be found to maintain cleanliness so that her goats and other cattle of the village could also drink water. Despite this, the problem remains unresolved. A meeting with the *Sarpanch* is scheduled in the community hall, and Sophia is expected to attend. What would you like to say as a villager, since the decision has to be taken in this meeting?

All the children were given the role of villagers, and the teacher suggested that they form smaller groups and write down what they are going to say to the *Sarpanch*.

Only a few children spoke; there was some repetition because they are from the same neighbourhood. These were their main points:

1. Earlier, a few people in the village bathed in the pond. When someone from the village died, everyone would stop under the tree near the pond, and many took bath there. Since the water supply through taps began, this practice has become less frequent. However, animals still used it as a water source.
2. Garbage from nearby villages was being dumped in the pond.
3. Sometimes, small animals drowned in the pond.

As the meeting was going on, there was some whispering going on among the children. Then, two children suggested to the *Sarpanch* that animals and family members were falling ill, so the garbage should be thrown somewhere away from the pond and all the villagers should be informed about this.

Session 3

What: Problem-solving by focusing on the wider relationship between the local pond and the villagers.

Why: To get acquainted with the administrative and systematic processes of the village and collect suggestions for a human solution to the identified problem.

How:

1. By asking the class if there was anything more that they wanted to tell the *Sarpanch*.
2. By telling the groups that they would now go to the community hall where one of them would play the part of Sophia. The children were told to state their case clearly so that the pond would be cleaned and the water, made safe.

Finding solutions through theatre

As soon as the children settled down, the teacher took on the role of the *Sarpanch*, complete with the *saafa* (turban). Seated in a chair, the teacher said, 'You are all welcome to the community hall. In today's meeting, we need to talk about the pond in our village. Now you can tell me your concerns.'

The children talked about their problems and the *Sarpanch* listened to them, all the while making sure that everyone in the group had the opportunity to speak. Some of the main points made by the children were:

1. Provide a garbage container in another place, so we can throw the garbage there.
2. The pond must be cleaned, otherwise our animals will die.
3. The pond water has to be cleaned for another reason – our animals drink that water, and we drink their milk.

The *Sarpanch* finally agreed to get the pond cleaned, and said, 'I will make arrangements for the cleaning of the pond, and now I will have to leave as I have some other work.' The *Sarpanch* got up from the chair and went out of the classroom and returned as the teacher.

Thus, through role-play, the relationship between the children and the teacher in the class deepened. They were able to speak freely: some children pointed out that if the pond was not cleaned, the irrigation canals to the field would get obstructed and they did not have enough money to fetch water from far away sources. A child said that dumping

waste would make the pond completely unusable and would also degrade the quality of groundwater. They asked: What will we do then? Where will the animals go to drink water?

In the theatrical process, the children were participating in the same way as before, with some children more active than others. But the conversation failed to include Sophia's character, which could have, perhaps, led to a more effective discussion with the *Sarpanch*.

Follow up

The teacher wrote down a list of the functions of a *Sarpanch* in the village on the blackboard. The Circle Time discussion was on ways to get the pond cleaned with the help of the people of the village. The teacher aided the process by helping the children to write down their thoughts and conclusions.

Reflection on effectiveness

One of the results of these discussion sessions was that the children were able to see what the *Sarpanch's* role in the village is. Although some of the children did not even know who the *Sarpanch* was, others realised that he/she had many other duties, such as obtaining Aadhar cards for the

residents.

The next discussion with the children was to find out what should be done with their lists. Some said they would give it to the *Sarpanch*; others wanted to keep their lists. Some others offered to collect garbage from their houses and dispose of it in the right place.

This activity can be followed by a discussion on the water system and its distribution in the village. Especially in class IV, work can be done on related themes like carrying water and gender sensitivity and the invaluable significance of water in a home.

Conclusion

During our regular school visits, it is usually seen that children hesitate to express themselves in the school environment and in the classroom teaching processes. Thus, expressing opinions and finding solutions remain neglected, which gradually starts to settle into the basic nature or character of the child. A child has to explore his intimate connection with the environment again and again in various ways. Only then will a child, as a citizen, realise his connection with the environment and be able to protect it.



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