

Stories generally attract and interest all age groups of children provided they get a chance to participate actively and understand what is happening in the story. For teachers too, it can be a tool where various developmental domains and learning outcomes can be reached.

In my initial experience, the storytelling sessions with students of classes I and II were not at all successful. With lower attention spans, the children stopped actively participating after a few minutes. I learnt that the essence of the story is to keep the children connected with the different characters and their emotions rather than questioning them to assess their knowledge. Initially, I asked many questions on every page due to which the connection with the story would be interrupted and children would lose interest. When I tried telling stories with actions and voice modulation and did not ask many questions, I observed that students started listening to the stories more attentively.

Similarly, I did not imagine that I would be able to engage children in *anganwadi* centres (aged between 3-5 years) in storytelling sessions but when I began telling stories during circle time, they listened so attentively that they were also able to draw the characters of the story after a session. They could describe the story in their own words – in their home language or through art. Storytelling also helped as a general pedagogy when I faced issues, such as children fighting, making noise or not doing the work given to them. Storytelling became the go-to, or saviour, strategy whenever my lesson plans failed to work with the students. It has worked well with students of *anganwadis*, primary as well as in upper primary classes.

Observing the gradual transition of the students from not taking interest in reading books to running to the library and asking me to read out stories, I learnt how the manner of telling a story is also important. A storyteller must do the following:

- Acquire the skills of voice modulation and intonation
- Aptly synchronise the telling of the story with suitable actions

- Choose stories that will be of interest to the listeners
- Prepare and plan the story you are going to tell by going through it several times
- Use appropriate TLMs
- Practise before the session

Storytelling, in my opinion, should provide a chance to the learners to think differently and independently. Opportunities to present different points of view and opinions should be provided and encouraged. For example, leaving the ending of the story open for children to interpret

Big Book story: Dhani ke teen dost

I read out a part of the story, *Dhani Ke Teen Dost*,ⁱ a *Big Book*ⁱⁱ to the children in an *anganwadi* centre and asked them to interpret what might have happened to the crow in the middle of the story (the children had to look at the pictures in the book and tell me this based on their own imagination and reasoning). Children were curious and had questions, such as: Where did the animals go? Why was Dhani upset?

I asked them to think and tell me. I could see that they were able to build their own connections and I continued the story with actions and gestures. One student said, 'The crow met with an accident and its leg broke, so it started to cry loudly.' Another said, 'The crow is hungry that's why it is crying.' Yet another added, 'Due to the heat it fell down while flying.' I was amused how they were able to bring newer ideas seeing the same pictures. As a teacher, I appreciated and acted as a facilitator rather than an instructor during the session.

An important objective of preschool education is that children become effective communicators. This can be achieved by providing the children opportunities for expression during such storytelling sessions. It can be further connected with the larger aims of education to make a person a rational and independent thinker with clarity of thought and decision-making, rather than accepting facts without logic.

Effective storytelling

In using stories and storybooks as pedagogy for young children effectively, the following should be kept in mind:

Choice of storybooks

- Storybooks must have more pictures and less text.
- They should be bright and colourful to attract children and keep them engaged.
- Characters and contexts of stories should be of interest to children, like animals, nature, etc.
- The text and illustrations in storybooks should match in a way that helps children to develop print-awareness.
- Stories should not be too long because the attention span of children is short.
- The language of the story should be easy. For example, if the text in the story rhymes, it is easier for the students to comprehend and repeat during the class. This helps in development of oral language and listening and in increasing attention span.

After the story

- After every storytelling session, have a guided conversation or ask open-ended questions related to the story to assess the children's understanding of the story as well as providing them opportunities for creative expression and thinking, both orally and in writing/drawing.
- Multiple questions should be avoided during the session as it hampers the connection of the story to the listeners. Questions should be open-ended to give students the opportunity to think and answer by connecting with their own surroundings. For example, after reading

this story, I asked these questions: Do you also have any animal friends like Dhani? If yes, which animal? What does your animal friend like to eat? This enables children to learn in real world contexts, talking, problem solving, asking questions, sharing information, exchanging ideas, reflecting and integrating information with existing, knowledge and skills.

Sparking curiosity and interest

- Providing access to different storytelling modes, like using picture cards, *Big Books*, stick puppets and by opportunities for creative self-expression, such as answering questions or making predictions about the story; expressing through art or doing role plays fulfilling multiple Learning Objectives (LOs) where the child expresses and represents ideas, imagination, emotions using variety of mediums/forms (music, art, dance/drama) verbally, through actions, visual arts, etc.
- In order to ensure active participation of the students, teachers should involve the students in questions, actions and gestures, repetition of sound words which improves their self-expression and language development. For example- In the story, the sounds of animals like of crow was *kao-kao*, cat was *myao-myao* which is directly related to introductory phonological awareness skills and identifies similar sounds in the environment.

Storytelling as a pedagogy provides a window for the teacher to experiment with the same story in different ways, guide the students to create more stories and become a better storyteller. It serves the purpose of not only an important learning tool but also caters to the well-being of children and provide immense enjoyment.

Endnotes

- Dhani Ke Teen Dost*, Suresh Swapnil, Room to Read India.
- Big Books* are intended for young children who are learning to read. These help connect children with printed material so that they are inspired to look at, browse, and read books on their own.



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