

It is because of my love for stories that I take this medium of engagement to the classrooms, hoping that my excitement for reading and listening to stories gets rubbed off on at least a few of our young students.

One day in June last year, on a regular school visit to a school in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, I had gone prepared with a few stories that I would tell the children. The teacher of classes I to III multi-grade, multi-level (MGML) and I discussed the plan for the day. The teacher informed me that a revision and two poems needed to be completed. The two poems were from the textbook, one was about a cow, and the other was about a bird building a nest. So, together we planned the revision of the poems about animals that the children already knew.

After this, I read aloud the story *Har Ped Jaruri Hai* (Level 2, Pratham Books). This story mentions numbers, various types of trees, birds that sit on them, different flowers and where they grow. The children were familiar with the names of the common trees like, banyan, *peepul*, *neem*, tamarind, *jamun* and birds and insects that were in the book, like the parrot and the honeybee. But they were not able to make out the difference between the pigeon and the bat even after prompting them to look at the way the bat was shown hanging in the illustration. Later, when I told them that it is a bat, one of them said that he has seen it in the night when he was playing outside after dinner. The conversation created an opportunity for shared experiential learning.

Then, the teacher talked about how, in her childhood, she had seen fireflies many times but now they were hard to find. The children were curious about where the firefly got its light from. Their answers were very interesting; they mentioned battery and solar power and a TV show in which a bear helps a firefly find its light in the forest!

Since we had to do a poem involving birds and the nest and having read the story regarding the trees, I thought we could take the children outside, and make them see the different varieties of trees that are around them. As the children came from homes around the school, it was also a chance for

the children to show us around and point out the different varieties of trees in their locality.

Just opposite the school is a big tree – it is three trees growing together as one – a *bargad*, a *peepul* and a *neem*. The trunks and branches of all three are intertwined together. We helped the children understand the difference between the three with the help of the features of the three different trees, like the shape, colour and texture of the leaves and the hanging roots of the banyan tree. There were elders resting under the tree, who gave the children some leaves that they could touch and feel.

The children observed squirrels climbing the tree through the ariel roots and a few birds, like crows and sparrows flying towards and sitting on the tree. A child noticed a beehive on the tress and nudged me to stop and see it and acknowledge him. Then we walked around in the neighbourhood, and observe other trees, like papaya and *ber*. The children were familiar with these trees.

When we got back to the classroom, each child had brought leaves from different trees. The teacher and I discussed with the children what they had seen. Then we made a poster with the different leaf shapes and their names under it and put up the poster in the classroom. After this, we recited the poem about the bird building a nest with actions. The children talked about how they have seen birds in their nests on the tree. A child shared how a pigeon had built its home with pieces of wood on their terrace.

Linking stories to curricular needs

The teacher then started with the chapter she needed to cover by engaging with the children first in a picture conversation based on trees and how trees are one's friends with some prompts.

- If trees were your friends, what would you do with them?
- Where would you take them? Why?
- Which trees will you accept as your friends? Why?

The children's answers were also diverse and varied. The trees that they mentioned they wanted to be friends with were mainly, mango, guava, pomegranate, tamarind and neem. The reasons given were that they were big and children could

play under them, rest in their shade, sell their fruit and earn money. When asked why would the tree be willing to give them fruit for them to sell and earn money, a child said that the tree would also fulfil its part in the friendship.

Perspectives and pedagogic practices

I realise that bringing in the medium of storytelling and creating the space for conversation and discussion has not only helped me take the story *Har Ped Zaruri Hai* to the children but has also helped the teacher catch and sustain children's interest and attention and build momentum by altering it as per the needs of the classroom.

The curricular content is also important as the story made the children active, interested, and participative, especially because the topic being talked about was something they could connect with and contribute to. It was really enjoyable and enriching to be part of these conversations amongst the children as well as the collective discussions and sharing in the classroom.

Actively and instantaneously trying to integrate innovative approaches to take forward the curricular content was very interesting for me. Not only the children but also their teacher and I enjoyed the experience. In a way, it became more meaningful and enhanced the way the children connect to their surroundings with what they study and engage within their classroom. At the end of the day, the teacher told me, 'I thought you were just going to tell the students some story; I did not think we will be doing all this, and also completing today's portion!' She said that pedagogic approaches like this gave her an idea as to how to integrate all the resources available in the environment in the day-to-day classroom engagements.

Child-friendly approach

The above instance is one example of classroom practice. I can think of various other instances

when children as well as the teachers and I were astonished at how much simple storytelling can help us open up the world of thinking, imagination and communication in the classroom spaces and at the level of each child.

Academically speaking, storytelling as a pedagogic approach helps in achieving the following learning outcomes that are considered foundational. The learner is able to:

- Associate words with pictures
- Name familiar objects seen in the picture
- Respond to comprehension questions related to stories in home language/school language/ English/sign language, orally or in writing (phrases/ short sentences) if they want to
- Identify characters and sequence of events in a story
- Express their opinion verbally and ask questions about the characters, storyline, etc., in the home language/school language/English/ sign language
- Draw/write a few words/short sentences in response to the story
- Think back on their own experiences and add them to the classroom discussion

Repeatedly engaging with stories, both for their own value and with an intention to link to curricular content, made me recollect time and again John Holt's words, which I read in *How Children Learn*: 'Call it a Faith. The faith is that man is by nature a learning animal. Therefore, we do not have to "motivate" children into learning. We do need to keep picking away their minds to make sure they are learning. What we need to do, and all we need to do is bring much of the world as we can into the school and the classroom; give children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for; listen respectfully when they feel like talking; and then get out of the way. We can trust them to do the rest.'

References

Har Ped Zaroori Hai by Praba Ram and Sheela Preuit, Pratham Books. Illustrated by Sangeetha Kadur. Translated by Deepa Tripathi. <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/17146-har-ped-zaruri-hai>



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