

Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool to teach English in a Government Primary School

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Key Words: Storytelling, Baat-cheet, Reading, Dramatization, Writing.

Abstract

This paper attempts to give an insight into how story telling can be used as a Pedagogical tool to develop English language competencies. This is an Action Research conducted in a Government School in Almora district of Uttarakhand, on 16 children of Classes Four and Five. The research shows how through storytelling, English vocabulary building, sentence construction, reading, writing and dramatization can be developed.

Introduction

Storytelling as a Pedagogical tool is being increasingly used in the classroom. As a Pedagogical tool, stories are told not just for entertainment or engagement but with certain educational purposes. In the study, the purpose of storytelling was to develop in children English language capabilities consisting of the ability to tell a story, develop vocabulary, construct sentences, increase reading and writing skills and be able to dramatize a story. This Action research was conducted in a government primary school in Almora district of Uttarakhand. 16 children of Classes Four and Five participated in the study, of whom 6 were fluent in reading in English, 6 were able to decode, while 4 had little knowledge of letters. The teachers were involved throughout the process of action research.

Preparation

Preparation for the study took almost one week, in which we worked two hours each day., I focused on two elements:

- Selection of the story: Krishna Kumar (n.d) talks of the competencies required for storytelling by teachers and discusses what should go into the selection of stories, for example, the story should be worth listening to, it should be relevant to life, students should be able to read it and so on. Based on these thoughts, an English story was selected, in which certain words and sentences occurred repeatedly (repeated words are given in italics in the story). The story was translated into Hindi.
- A day-specific plan was prepared from baat-cheet (discussion), for reading and writing.

Process

The selected story was first narrated to children accompanied by actions and gestures. On the first day, the story was

narrated in Hindi with a few English words and sentences. On subsequent days more of English began to be used. The story narrated to students is given below.

Once upon a time, an elephant lived in a jungle. He had no friend[s]. One day, in search of a friend, he went into the jungle. Suddenly, he met a monkey. The elephant said to the monkey, "brother monkey, brother monkey, will you be my friend?" The monkey said, "no, no, no, you are so big, I am so small. You can't swing like me. I will not be your friend". The elephant was very sad but the next day he went to search of friends again. He met a rabbit. The elephant said, "sister rabbit, sister rabbit, will you be my friend?" [The] rabbit said, "no, no, no, you are so big, I am so small. You can't enter my burrow. I will not be your friend". The elephant was very sad. Next day he met a frog. The elephant said, "brother frog, brother frog, will you be my friend?" The frog said, "no, no, no, you are so big. I am so small. You will squish me. I will not be your friend". The elephant was very sad. [The] next day, the elephant saw, all the animals running. The elephant asked the fox, "why are you running?" The fox said, "there is a lion, he wants to kill us and eat us". The elephant kicked the lion and the lion fell far away. All the animals became [sic] very happy and they made friends with the elephant.

Baat-Cheet (Discussion)

After narrating the story, I asked the students a few questions to start the discussion.

1. What do you think, why were the animals not making friends with the elephant?
2. What kinds of friends do you like?
3. What do you think of the elephant kicking the lion, was he right to do so?

The real names of children have been given hereafter seeking the teacher's

permission and the conversation recorded is as follows:

Some of the answers to the first question were:

Anjali and Somika of Class Five: */Kyonki haathi bahut bada tha aur baki janwar chote the, aur unko haathi se dar lagta hoga.* / [The elephant was very big and the other animals were small. They were probably afraid of the elephant.]

Babli and Sangeeta of Class Four: */Kyonki haathi aur khargosh mein to dosti nahin ho sakti.* / [An elephant and a rabbit cannot be friends.]

Me: Why?

Children: */Kyonki dosti samaan samaan mein hote hain.* / [Friendship happens between equals.]

Me: */Samaan samaan matalab?/* [Equal means?]

Children: */Matalab same size ka hona chaahie.* / [The size should be the same.]

Me: */To iska matalab jo tumse bade hote hai, unse dostee nahin karoge? Matalab mujhse dosti nahin karoge?/* [That means, you, you will not be friends with people older than you? You will not be friends with me?]

Kapil: */Kyon nahin karenge, aap se kar sakte hain.* / [No, we can be friends with you.]

Babli: */Mujhe jo achchha lagega usee se dosti karungee.* / [I will make friends only with people I like.]

Regarding the third question, the children had the following answers:

Divanshi: */Achchha kiya haathi ne. Sher ko maarana chaahiye.* / [The elephant was right. The lion should be killed.]

All the children agreed.

Me: */Achchha socho tum log apane pasandita chikan khaane ja rahe ho, tumhaare munh se kisee ne khaana chheen liya aur tumhen laat maar diya, to tumhen kaisa lagega?/* [Just think you are eating your favourite chicken dish and someone comes and snatches it away

from you and then kicks you. How would you feel?]

Children in chorus: */Bilkul achchha nahin lagega.* / [We will not like it at all.]

Kapil: */Main bhee use laat maar doonga.* / [I will kick him too.]

Me: */To phir haathi ne sher ke saath jo kiya woh theek kaise hai?/Usne to uske munh se khaana chheen liya.* / [Then how can what the elephant did be right? He snatched the food out of his mouth.]

The children thought for some time.

Babli: */Phir madam haathi ne galat kiya us sher ko laat nahin maarna tha.* / [Then what the elephant did was wrong. He should not have kicked the lion.]

Kapil: */Nahin sher ko maarna chaahiye. Pichhale haphte hamaara kutta uthaake le gaya. Mere saamne aaye to main maaroonga.* / [No, the lion should be killed. Last week it killed my dog. If it comes in front of me, I will kill it.]

Me: */Achchha tumhe kya lagta hai sher tumhaare ghar kyon aaya hoga? Use insaan achchha lagta hai kya?/* [Why do you think the tiger came to your house? Does he like humans?]

Anjali: */Nahin, sher bhee hamse darate hai.* / [No, the tiger is also afraid of us.]

Me: */Phir? socho, har saal jangal mein ham aag laga dete hainna?/* [Just think, every year we set fire to the jungle.]

Me: */To, sher ko kaisa lagta hoga?/* [How do you think the lion/tiger feel, when they see the fire?]

Kapil: */Achchha nahin lagta hoga madam.* / (They couldn't be liking it.)

Me: */Ab jangal mein aag lagaane se kya hota hai?/* [What happens when we burn the jungle?]

Children together: */Jaanavar mar jaate hain aur ped jal jaate hain.* / (The animals die and the trees are destroyed.)

Me: */Socho, agar kharagosh aur hiran mar jaayege to sher kyak haayega?/* [Just think, if rabbits and deer die what will the lion eat?]

Somika: /*Haan madam, iseeke liya[sic] sher hamaare gaon mein aake kutte aur bakree ko uttaake le jaate hain[sic].*/ [Yes madam, that's why the tiger snatches our dogs and goats.]

Me: /*Bilakul. Agar ham jangal mein aag nahin lagae to sher ko hamaare gaon aane kee jaroorat nahin padegee. Aap ko kya lagata hai?*/ [Exactly. If we do not set fire to the jungle, it will no longer be necessary for lions to come to our village. What do you think?]

Children: /*Haan madam. Jangal mein aag nahin lagaani chaahie.*/ [Yes madam, we should not set the jungle on fire.]

Me: /*To haathi ne theek kiya kya?*/ [So what the elephant did was right?]

Amit: /*Haathi ne to theek nahin kiya. Lekin apne dost ko bhee bachaana hai na museebat se.*/ [What the elephant did was not right, but he had to save his friends.]

Me: /*Ye bhee bilkul sahee baat hain.*/ [Yes, that is also a valid point.].

Towards the end of the discussion, everyone agreed that jungles should not be burnt; and one should save one's friends when they are in danger.

Discussion on Vocabulary and Sentence

The next day, the same story was retold entirely in English, with actions, gestures and repetition of words; and the children understood the whole story. The story was repeated a few times until the children themselves started telling the story. They found some dialogues funny, which they kept repeating throughout the day and had a good laugh. After narrating the story in English, I wrote a list of words on the blackboard: For example: Once upon a time, In search of friends, ...

Me: Once upon a time /*Iska matalab kya hai?*/ [What does it mean?] The children thought for a while.

Me: Once upon a time there was an elephant; /*Kya matalab hai isaka?*/ [What does it mean?]

Children: /*Bahut samay pahale ek haathi tha*/ [Once upon a time there was an elephant.]

Me: /*Very good. To socho, once upon a time ka matalab kya hai.*/ Once upon a time I had a doll. [Just think, what is the meaning of "once upon a time".]

Children: /*Ek samay mere paas ek doll thee[sic]*/ [Once upon a time, I had a doll.]

Me: /*Very good. To batao tumhaare paas once upon a time kya kya tha jo ab nahin hain?*/ [So tell me about what you had once upon a time, but not now.]

Anjali: /*Mere paas ek sundar dress thee.*/ [I had a beautiful dress.]

Me: /*To tum aisa bologe, once upon a time I had a beautiful dress.*/ [Say it like this.]

Somika: /*Once upon a time I had a pen.*/

The same process was followed for other words on day three.

Questions-Answers and Reading

On the fourth day, the morning assembly was extremely chaotic as the children started fighting over whose turn it was to tell the story in English. The teacher solved the problem by creating a storytelling calendar. In the classroom, I wrote the story on a chart paper and asked the children to read it one by one. Fourteen out of sixteen students read it easily, with minor problems. If one of the students struggled with a word, the others supported them. I asked questions in English to track their story comprehension. The children responded to the questions in Hindi. When I asked them to answer in English by referring to the story on the chart, they were able to identify the line that had the answer and then respond in English. This whole

exercise was very meaningful in terms of assessing oral and reading comprehension of the students.

Dramatization of the Story

The story was dramatized by the children with minimal intervention from me. When I asked whether they remembered any discussions from the story, the students recited several sentences. Together, we made it into a play; more characters were added keeping in mind the number of children. After just two to three rehearsals the children were able to enact the story confidently. When the play was presented before the local community, everyone was in awe to see the children of the government school performing in English.

Writing

On the fifth day of classroom practice, we ventured towards writing. Since animals were the main characters in the story, I picked an animal, say "tiger", and asked the children to tell me about it. To help the children, I asked them about its appearance, colour, food habits, etc. The children described the tiger in Hindi, and I translated their descriptions in English and wrote the words one by one on the blackboard. I managed to elicit almost 20 words from the children. We discussed words such as "wild" and "domestic" animals. Some of the other words we discussed were: yellow, long tail, foul smell (the children said that when there is a tiger close by, they get a foul smell), meat, chicken, dog, jungle, four legs, two eyes, etc. Following this, I helped the children to form sentences using these words. To begin with, I made two-three

sentences in English to help them. Some of the sentences I made were: The Tiger is a wild animal. It has four legs. Together, we made 15 sentences around tigers using the vocabulary of the children. By the end of the seventh day, the children had written seven paragraphs on different wild and domestic animals found in their vicinity.

Conclusion

The use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool had many positive outcomes. The confidence the children gained through this process was particularly noteworthy. Even learners like Pooja and Kapil, who initially had no interest, took part in English storytelling during morning assembly, reading exercises and drama. By the end of the seventh day, all sixteen students could narrate and enact the story with comprehension; fourteen could read and thirteen started writing sentences in English. Their writing had grammatical and spelling mistakes but demonstrated their interest in writing independently. Their teacher was surprised to see the progress made by the children within a limited time.

This study gives a fair idea of the potential of a story to create an opportunity for discussion, boost the learners' ability to listen and think, provide an opportunity for speaking in a new language with comprehension and develop reading and writing skills. In rural government schools, where children are mostly from the underprivileged section of the society and have little or no exposure to English, a story provides them with a wholesome exposure to the language, generates an interest in learning and allows them to explore it. This powerful tool can break the traditional notion that children of government schools cannot learn the English language.

Reference

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