

The languages of education in multilingual India: exploring effects on reading and mathematics

1st dissemination event: 12–13 July 2018, New Delhi, India

Session summary:

How can storytelling be used to further language and literacy development?

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The session began with a quotation by Wjynryb (2003), slightly annotated (in brackets) to make it more comprehensive:

Stories represent an imaginary [or real] world created by a variety of devices such as theme, characters, illustrations, vocabulary, humour, dialogue and the like, and help to promote not only language and literacy development, but also imagination and fantasy along with cognitive, [affective] and aesthetic development.

Generally, everyone agreed with the purpose of storytelling as captured in the quotation.

In groups, participants discussed a set of points provided on a handout (see below). The groups were found discussing several important but differing points depending on the kind of backgrounds they came from. One group which was mainly made up of government school teachers looked at stories mainly as enabling language learning, with a focus on vocabulary development, reading, etc. as they came from a high school context. A 'story teller' in another group was found to be narrating stories as well as demonstrating different approaches to telling stories to various age groups. Other groups discussed all the questions bringing in lots of examples from their own experience.

In plenary, the participants came up with a variety of views relating to how the approach to storytelling depended on the purpose and the age group of learners, using stories to teach different content subjects including math and social sciences. An important point that came up was that the stories given in the text book will also need to be modified based on learner interests and needs; the importance of class libraries and an actual example of how it has worked very well even in an early grade class was also discussed.

Using a project I had done with young children (Grade 5) as an example, I explored the importance of identifying the kind of stories children liked to read/listen to and how 'visualisation' as a technique can be enhanced while reading stories, in turn improving reading comprehension. This visualisation was later transferred to a drawing activity and it was interesting to see how each child's drawing was very different from the others' and that some children had more than one drawing for their story. The children told their own stories based on their drawings to other children which were very imaginative, and different from the original one. This also allowed children to use a lot of their own L1, an important dimension of language learning, i.e. using children's L1 as a resource although it was an English class. The most meaningful activity was when parents came to a class-meeting which is a routine practice in school and children narrated the stories emerging from the drawings to their parents in their own language. This way one could witness several languages at play in a genuine interaction where meaning making was the focus.



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It is important to note that story telling is not just a 'fun-time' or extra activity but an integral part of the regular curriculum where both teachers and learners can explore not only different languages but also do the serious business of teaching and learning English (or any other language) in a multilingual context. A next step would also be to give learners, of any age group, the freedom to choose their own stories and ways in which to use them: simple narration, using learner-made props, dramatising, various comprehension exercises, etc. Stories are a very versatile resource that can be exploited for a variety of purposes in a variety of contexts.



Session handout

Stories represent an imaginary world created by a variety of devices such as theme, characters, illustrations, vocabulary, humour, dialogue and the like, and help to promote not only language and literacy development, but also imagination and fantasy along with cognitive and aesthetic development (Wajnryb 2003).

Do you agree with this quote?

How do we exploit stories and storytelling to help learners?

Questions we can examine when we discuss this in small groups:

- At what age(s) or till what age can we use storytelling in the classroom?
- Word based and/or wordless ones? In which language(s)?
- What kind of illustrations?
- Methodology to be used: ways in which teacher can tell stories and learners can tell stories (props, imaginary/fantasy vs real, relating to student lives etc.
- What kind of tasks can we use based on our stories/storytelling?
- Inside/outside the classroom? (Home)
- Class libraries??
- Challenges? Add others