

Sustaining Cultural Values in Formal Education: Integration of Folktales in School Language Curriculum

Dr. Ch. Sarajubala Devi & Dr. Melissa Wallang

Associate Professors

sarajubala@yahoo.com, melissancert@gmail.com

NERIE-NCERT, Shillong

Abstract

Education must respond to the needs of the society as a whole and the individual. As a result, it also should reflect the aspirations of the people: the social, cultural, emotional, and economic needs of the learners. Therefore, the desired curriculum of today's globalized world should be integrating technological advancement at the same time retaining the cultural values. However, the present day education in the country by and large, suffers from the gap between its content and the lived experience of the students. Schools must strive to restore and sustain the universal and eternal values oriented towards the unity and integration of the people, their moral and spiritual growth enabling children to realize their potential, at the same time realizing the purpose of life. With the renewed impetus on accepting the idea of constructivism we have to allow a child to build new knowledge on the basis of his/her previous knowledge. Folktales contain a wealth of knowledge handed down from generation to generation. It is also the reflection of cultural wisdom, the value system, the inclusivity required in the society etc. Folktales in brief tell the practical ways of living, of knowing the reality in the context in an amusing way in an easy language. If we want to inculcate the cultural values, folktale is a viable tool. The paper intends to look into the ways of integrating folktales in formal language curriculum for the sustenance of cultural values.

Keywords: education, folktale, constructivism, teaching and learning, curriculum, integration of knowledge.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that education moulds and shapes a society, it is the basic essence of life and actions. Getting education means preparation for future life. Our mind is always processing new information from the environment in which we live and connect with the new knowledge required for the future/. It is important that the available knowledge is relevant to the future needs of the society. society and knowledge are the two faces of the same coin which empowers and enables a person to realize his/her own potential to an optimal level. On the societal front education helps in transmitting society's norms and values, sociologist Emile Durkheim

maintains “Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities with collective life demands”.

Society through education performs the task of creating solidarity through cooperation, social solidarity, and social life, which basically aims at developing a sense of commitment, a sense of belongingness, and a feeling that a real-life and powerful society exists and that he is a part of it. Educational institutions serve as miniature societies where that children learn that basic value of the society. Therefore, education is a social process. The functions of education are mainly imparting survival knowledge, norms and values, culture and heritage and provide them skill and placement.

The Background

National Curriculum 2005 (NCF 2005) stated that knowledge is constructed by the child. It implies that curricula, syllabi, and textbooks should enable the teacher in organizing classroom experiences, in consonance with the child’s nature and environment. Children are natural learners; they constantly explore, respond, invent, and work things out to add meaning to the world around them. Childhood involves being socialised to adult society, in acquiring and creating knowledge of the world and in relating oneself to others, in order to understand, to act, and to transform. Each new generation inherits the storehouse of culture and knowledge in the society by integrating it into one’s own web of activities and understanding, and in realising its ‘fruitfulness’ in creating afresh (p.12). The relevance of folktales in the lives of children, lies in the fact that they pass on wisdom in a symbolic form from one generation to another.

Folktale

According to Eliade, 1964, “Folktales reflect a primordial condition and possesses a complex cultural identity. They attempt to supply a model for human behavior”. It is a tale which was in the society, which has been narrated, widely told and retold. The lessons that a folktale teaches a society is immense, in the sense that it teaches the ways of responding to both physical and the social challenges that one has to face. The lived experience of the people /folk is reflected in the folktale. Folktales basically set up a fundamental contrast between good and evil, intelligence and stupidity, making the hearer/reader to understand the polarities and ways of resolving the conflict.

In addition to these, many folktales have stories about the origin of cultural practices, the way taboos are observed, explaining specific habits of various animals, the relation between the animals, plants, and humans etc. Folktales serve as the foundation of moral values, ethics and wisdom thereby providing us with the ability to become a member of a certain culture and society.

It enables a person to behave well, so in general, folktales provide a moral lesson. There are thousands of stories that teach the moral of cooperation, fellow feeling, friendliness, kindness, sympathy, truthfulness and understanding, etc. Most importantly, children find folktales entertaining, they want to envisage the further of the story, they see amusement, fascination and the lure of enjoyment created by the magic and the imaginary things, the supernatural beings, the foolish characters, the wise characters, the extraordinary worlds available in abundant, in the folktales. Culturally, it is used to teach important lessons about human values and in turn prepares the children to live well, with a deeper understanding not only of their fellow beings but also the trees, plants, animals, the surroundings etc. Folktales also provide a common language to communicate the issues that are relevant to our lives.

Folktales is the most important tool used in socialization of the language as well as culture since time immemorial. It plays an integral role in helping learners increase their awareness of their critical consciousness and socio-cultural surroundings by preparing them to read cultural codes, interpret mythical languages from the context that are simple and easy to understand. Reading Folktale is a prelude to handle other literary, artistic, and contemporary entertainment categories which are prevalent in the society. It gives children the lessons to handle cultural and social situations more effectively in the real life. According to Bettelheim 2010, folktales act as a means through which children derive hope and believe in happy endings.

They serve as a foundation of moral values, ethics and wisdom thereby providing us with the ability to feel and be human. The ability to convey the cultural expectations, the values, the norms, the ethics in an interesting manner makes folktale sustainable and relevant through ages. The general happy endings of folktales give hope to the people. The narrative style, the themes, the magic, and the atmosphere they generate inspire a sense of security, the comfort; wisdom to resolve problems makes folktales timeless and lively. Folktales contain a unique way of telling and a cultural element which depends on the place and time when the story is being told.

No one can say whether the folktales or the traditional beliefs are earlier. Whatever the case is, what is important is that human beings in the course of their life experience many things, good as well as bad and they narrate their experiences in the form of a story, of which many beliefs have become obsolete, but few still remain, this is the real flavor that folktales give to the society.

Benefits in Language Learning

Language learning requires a relevant context which is easily accessible and redundant. The use of folktales enhances the cognitive ability and rhetorical reasoning skills while also bringing about pleasure and understanding to the reader. It promotes cooperative group work and the individual's pursuit of pleasure reading. These can be used to explore personal, psychological,

emotional, social, and cultural truths. Folktales provide a lifelong experience which deals with permanent truths and universal values. Folktales can be introduced in the classroom easily because they are simple, short, and authentic.

Folktale is good for developing mainly reading skills because of the following reasons:

- Language of Folktales is simple and easy to understand.
- They are short and reading them may not require the use of dictionaries which can spoil the reading pleasure.
- Certain similarities in different Folktales exist in many languages. Once children have read a Folktale, it is easy for them to read a similar kind of Folktale in other languages too, which will only happen as they develop as a learning individual.
- Can be divided into various structural language components that can provide basic language learning practice.
- Can enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar pattern and reading comprehension.
- For children to start reading which will form the basis of all literacy skills, the material available in their hand for reading should be simple, relevant, and culturally familiar to them. Unless, their reading exercise will be interesting and fun, they will be under compulsion to read it. If their first experience in reading is not interesting, they may not develop the desire to read more, and this will hamper their development of literacy skills. Thus, connecting folktales makes a potent source of reading material, as children have an inquisitive thinking, the excitement to know whether the story is one which they have known or a new one, will automatically develop the habit of reading in them.

Benefits in Psychological Development

Children's journey to adulthood involves battling the inner pressures and conflicts of growing up. Folktales speak to children about their struggles unconsciously in a way that they can understand (Bettelheim, 1989). Children's understanding of themselves, and the world does not happen overnight, and it needs to be built up in small steps. Children are drawn to Folktales which corresponds to the way they think, for instance, they believe in magical relationships between thoughts and things, and between inanimate and animate objects and so on. Children also tend to identify the good characters more easily, which awakens in them the desire to behave in the same positive way. Hence, folktales can contribute greatly to their social education. The child likes the folktale to tell him of someone who succeeds (Kready, 1916; Jones, 2002).

Children like to read folktales again and again which in turn influences their thinking. Folktales provide a foundation for children to understand their existence by providing a variety of environments, conflicts, and characters which children can experience. It also helps one in recreating and recognizing the events in life. Folktales are particularly a good way to teach children realistic thinking, as stories can show children how people realistically solve their problems. Folktales also help children find a way to look at another culture from within, they serve as a therapeutic function, and develops a framework for an individual's belief system. For a new reader, the ability to recognize the narrative structures along with their mythical significance, is a powerful tool for potential understanding of the culture. It can be read as entrances leading to more critical understanding of the socio-cultural surroundings. Since Folktales focus on universal human realities, the genre is capable of transcending cultural barriers and bringing harmony in the young minds of the children.

Why to Use Folktales in the Class

The tricky and complex situation/plot in folktales creates suspense in the listener/reader and he/she wants to read/listen to the whole story helping them to learn the language. The subtle ways of resolving the conflicts give hope to the children, as they find morals and optimism from the story. They can be exposed to the old wisdom and knowledge of humankind which we often forget about. Literature provides a wonderful source of material for eliciting strong emotional responses from students and using it in the classroom is a fruitful way of involving the learner as a whole person (Lazar, 1993).

One of the most important points in using folktales is that they can be adapted to the level of the child, where their composition of sentences and plot are simple and understandable. Writing down of folktales /fairy tales are directly related to the development of children's literature in the 18th and 19th centuries, which leads to an understanding that children should be reading folktales/fairy tales in childhood. Many scholars are of the opinion that folktales/fairytales reaffirm the character and cultural identity of the folk. Most often the basic values of life such as trust, hope, honesty, kindness, and the beliefs in a high power could be interpreted as a root of faith (Jones, 2002) is taught through folk tales. They inculcate the motivation to adhere to the significant values of the civilized society. Striving for these values is motivated and modelled in these tales, and the ground is set for success in the achievement of a meaningful life. They help children feel positive about other countries and cultures and can broaden their knowledge of the world (Cameron, 2001).

Situating in the Context

Here in this paper we propose two pedagogies of incorporating the folktale in school curriculum to sustain cultural values:

Pedagogy I: Inclusion of Folktale as a Text Selected to Teach in a Particular Class

We will take up one Manipuri folktale to teach values of honesty, willingness to help the poor and person in need, and the ill effects of greed in society. In addition to this, existing social taboos related to the Python is shown in a realistic setting rather than teaching it directly. Moreover, it also tries to establish a belief system by bringing up an event which is supposed to happen in the past. This is the manifestation function of using folktale. The story is *Laren Ningthou Ongbi* (the wife of the python king).

The events included in the folktale in brief are as follows:

Event 1: A widow's beautiful maid is working in the *Jhum*. There she met a handsome boy (a python in disguise) and he helped the girl in her *Jhum* related works. They eventually fell in love.

Value associated: Helping the mother is the duty of the child. Also helping the weak/needy people is desirous.

Event 2: The boy expressed his desire to marry her, the girl requests the boy to send his kin to ask for her hand. Since the boy was not a real human being but rather a python in human form, he could not do so, and he had no answer to the proposal.

Value associated: Knowing a future life partner is important (Marrying an unknown person is not appreciated).

Event 3: The girl narrated the whole story to her mother, and she found the matter quite suspicious. She wanted to know the truth: whether the boy is a human being or something else in disguise. She made a proper meal mixed with *charcoal*, *turmeric*, *onion*, and *garlic* and instructed her daughter to ask the boy to share the meal. As the God in Meitei belief, refuses the offerings of the ingredients mentioned, the python king did not eat the meal but ran away.

Value associated: Seeking help from the elderly is a good idea, reinforcement of cultural practice of taboo in relation to python.

Event 4: The mother-daughter duo realised that the boy was not a human being and so they kept quiet. The mother warned the daughter not to entertain the boy anymore. On the other hand, the boy fell ill and became bed-ridden. Knowing very well that he was dying he expressed his desire to meet his beloved only once. His mother was determined to fulfil her son's last wish.

Value associated: Following the advice of the mother, fulfilling the wish of a person in his/her death bed.

Event 5: The python's mother was disguised in the form of an old woman (in disguise) went to the girl's house and requested the mother-daughter duo to help her son and go along with her to meet the dying boy. As the belief that helping someone in real need is the onus of human being, they agreed to the proposal despite it being against the norm of the society.

Value associated: Helping a person in need is a human value.

Event 6: The two lovers met. The god/python wished to do something for his beloved in return of her love, so he gave her a precious gem which he possessed. The girl with her mother lived happily without any wants. The girl didn't marry anymore and remained as a faithful wife to the python husband.

Value associated: Life partners should be true to each other.

Event 7: The villagers were jealous of the fate of the girl, especially her brothers (the family had seven brothers). Since the brothers were strong, they caught a python and kept it with their sister overnight in a single room, as done by all married couples. Since the python was a real python (animal), not a god, it ate the sister that night itself. The life of the young girl ended because of the jealous and greedy nature of the brothers.

Value associated: Greed leads to destruction.

If the folktale is to be incorporated in the textbook, the language (vocabulary, syntax) should match with the cognitive level of the child. With this simple story, universal human values like helping the needy, taking advise of elders, honesty and trust towards a life partner could be taught and the ill effect of greed is reminded once again. All these values can be learned by children in an amusing manner. As children knew the story already and the tension of marrying a girl with a python, the learning of taboos may lead to realistic thinking. The teacher while teaching the folktale can help children learn narrative styles in language. Telling and retelling the folktale will enhance reading (with understanding) and summarization techniques.

Pedagogy II: Use of Folktale as an Authentic Writing

It is not required to include any specific folktale in the book since the curriculum load is a problem nowadays. Folktales of various languages and cultures which are readily available in the class can be used. The classroom process may be somewhat like this:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 22:3 March 2022

Dr. Ch. Sarajubala Devi & Dr. Melissa Wallang

Sustaining Cultural Values in Formal Education: Integration of Folktales in School Language Curriculum

1. Allow students to bring any folktale as an authentic material. Folktales thus collected will later be grouped into different subheads which are classified with an understanding of which value it is intended to reinforce.
2. After classification, one story would be given to a group of students to describe the characters, the places where the event happened, etc. This will help them to improve their reading and writing. Student's written work will be kept aside for further analysis on their writing skills.
3. The same group will be given the same story once again to retell the story; this will enhance their speaking skills.
4. As part of the discussion following each folktale, we will also look at the values and messages that are found within. These too can be charted and saved for subsequent examination of the similarities among the stories of various cultures.
5. We will also examine elements of the stories such as setting characters and behaviors and will try to write it down as a preliminary activity to learn literary writings. Using plot elements and characters can be helpful when you aim to discuss stories, films, novels, and other narrative genres in class.

Conclusion

The pedagogies suggested are not prescriptive in nature. There can be many more ways to use folktales in the classroom for fun, for role play extending even to deleting and replacing of characters of the story on the basis of children's perception and cultural understanding. Any one of the methods can be adopted by the teacher concerned, and in this process, children will learn values implicitly through a written, known story in a realistic setting, while practicing language skills.

References

Handoo, Jawaharlal and Reimund Kvideland (ed).1999. *Folklore in the Changing World*. Mysore: Zooni Publications

Kenneth W. Clark and Marry W. Clark (1966), 'Introducing Folklore', New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winson

Meitei, M. Mani. (2000). Culture and Folk Psyche: Meaning in a Manipuri Tale, Lai Khutsangbi, in Soumen Sen (ed) *Tradition and Folklore in North East India*, New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House.

Sharma, Jayantakumar. 2004. *Fungawari Singbul*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 22:3 March 2022

Dr. Ch. Sarajubala Devi & Dr. Melissa Wallang

Sustaining Cultural Values in Formal Education: Integration of Folktales in School Language Curriculum

Price Planaria (2001). “The Magic of Folktales for Teaching English and Culture”, Volume VI (files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED476596.pdf)

Willey Margaret, A few thoughts on folktales and Fairy tales. (www.margaretwilley.com/files/Thoughts_on_Folktales_and_Fairy_Tales.pdf)

Goh, Lina (1996). “Using myth, folktales and fairy tales an adult ESL classroom”, Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts, to Simon Fraser University. (summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/7152/b18293542.pdf)

Lepin, Maria. (2008/2009). “Fairy Tales in Teaching English Language Skills and values in School Stage II”, Faculty of Social Science and Education, Institute of Education, Curriculum of Educational Science (Humanities), University of Tartu (space.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/26014/Lepin.pdf)

Propp Vladimir, (1976) *Study of Folktale: Structure and History*, Disposito Vol. 1 No.3. (1976) 227-292 @ Department of Romance Languages, University of Michigan (https://monoskop.org/File:Propp_Vladimir_1966_1976_Study_of_the_Folktale_Struc...)

=====