

## **Teacher Education Institute (TEI)**

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### **Storytelling**

One of the main ways through which children develop their creative and imaginative faculties is through storytelling. As we shall see the process is not accidental and a great deal of our heritage, and the wisdom related to that heritage, has been passed to succeeding generations through storytelling. We still, therefore, need to tell stories, not just because children enjoy them (although this is sufficient reason in itself), but because it is probably the best way through which certain values, and wisdom associated with those values, is passed from one generation to another.

**The History of Storytelling** - In ancient times, when he was spending his first days on earth, man was a hunter rather than a cultivator. Storytelling would be one of the main forms of entertainment and communication. It must have happened in all parts of the world; from Mesopotamia to Peru; from China to the USA; from Europe to the South Pacific Islands. It happened in all places and at all times.

Stories gradually became an important part of celebrations and festivals. As the storyteller took on this role his importance as a member of the community increased to the point where he was relieved of other responsibilities. He became a leader and in some communities he was treated as possessing supernatural powers or perceptions. He was given a title - priest, leader or medicine man. He was the mediator between man and the gods.

Stories that were told were passed down from one generation to the next. Many related to the divine or the gods in one way or another. It should perhaps be of some significance to modern man that each civilization possessed stories of the Creation. From the Hebrews and their book of Genesis; from southern Europe, they were included in some of the tales of the Greek gods; from Northern Europe - the Norse gods; from the East stories from India, China and Japan; from the old lands of the West - the Indians, the Incas; from the South Pacific - the Maoris, the Philippines; many others could be added to the list.

Storytelling became totally interwoven with the values of a society. In particular ethical values and different types of behaviour were communicated through stories and tales. Such tales clearly indicated the values of that particular culture. They became known as folk tales and gradually a pattern, as far as the form of the story was concerned, began to emerge. Such tales met a need. They enabled the values of that culture to be passed down in a form appropriate for teaching children; they enabled expression of basic human experience, of longing and belonging, of sadness and joy; of hope and despair, of achievement and defeat.

They also met very basic needs. Everyone at some point in their lives wants to know "Who am I?"; "Where did I come from?" and so on. The stories belonging to any one culture would be different in that they related to the particular heroes or villains of that society. On the other hand they would also contain basic human experiences that were universal in nature. In other words although the details were characteristic and expressive of the local culture, the main content of the story was universal.

### **The Psychological Needs of Children**

All of us are born with qualities that need to be nurtured and developed. As human beings we possess an almost never-ending capacity to be recognized and related to in a certain way. Our inner experiences and perceptions influence, to a very large extent, the ways we relate to the outside world. This is the same whether for adults or children. However, as far as children are concerned their perceptions are different from adults.

### **The Nature of the Task for Children**

We need to fully appreciate that content needs to relate to childrens' inner experience. The way to wisdom, as far as children are concerned, is through the imaginative. The main task is not to inform but to provide situations where children find real meaning. Although the main part of childrens' meaning comes in their relationship with parents, the school situation does however play an extremely important role and the transmission of values belonging to that culture and meeting the psychological needs of children will substantially help the growth process. One of the main ways in which this occurs is through storytelling.

### **Importance of the Imagination**

The most important consideration is the experience children gain from hearing stories and that experience usually relates to the development of meaning. When children identify with characters going through traumatic or worrying experiences they can begin to understand their own anxieties and difficulties. Such stories satisfy basic needs of children. They can decide which person they want to identify with. It may not be easy for a parent to understand or accept but some children want and need to identify with the villain - some need to work out things in the dark side of their own nature.

### **Conclusion**

We have spent some time describing why it is so important for children to listen to stories. It is clear that children from an early age possess an awareness of their own search for meaning. The awareness is, of course, quite different from that of the adult.

Children do not possess the analytic faculties of the adult; their awareness is instinctive and deals with their immediate feelings and perceptions. Their awareness may appear to be in a state of fragmentation and even chaos to the adult. It is clear however that children are making every effort to bring order into their lives. One of the main ways children do this is by perceiving the world in terms of opposites.

As adults we hopefully have learned to integrate and deal with the many conflicting and contradictory sides of our nature. Within children these conflicting feelings are, to an extent and from an adult's viewpoint, undisciplined and uncontrolled.

Children usually, when they hear appropriate stories, are able to identify without difficulty to the behaviour and actions of the one dimensional "goody" or "baddy". They are able through this identification and empathy to start sorting out their own conflicts and ambivalent feelings.

Stories however do not only assist children in this way but can help them to a further stage of growth. Children are not only able to start isolating and coming to terms with strongly felt emotions; they are able to express or, at the very least, identify with the expression of such emotions by characters in the story.

This is an important stage of growth for all children; for children with behavioural problems it may well be crucial. Children can come to terms or, at the very least function differently if they can, through stories, drama, the retelling of stories and so on, relate to characters in the story; in particular to negative actions and thoughts. Children will feel safer and more secure if they know that their negative behaviour will be met with discipline, tolerance, patience and love.

### **Storytelling as an important teaching strategy**

All the above points are covered in detail in the course "Storytelling" as well as the following as far as the implementation of teaching strategy is concerned. Regarding the latter, five main points are covered. They enable students to experience and develop the following: 1) Affective, 2) Cognitive - the effectiveness of stories to transmit knowledge, 3) Including Language Arts, 4) Introduction of different concepts, and 5) Scaffolding/Sequential Learning.