

A Study on Using Puppets to Teach Children in The Foundational Years

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Abstract

Indian society has a strong association with puppets. Different regions of India produce different puppets. These puppets can be used in the classroom to explain different concepts to children. Puppets speak stories in the hands of an excellent puppeteer. Kathputli of Rajasthan is famous all over the world. Similarly Ravana Chhaya of Odisha and Putala nach of Assam are common. Every society carries with them stories that can be transferred to our children through some wonderful means. One of them is through stories and when brought to classrooms can be used to explain different concepts to children. India as a nation has a long association with puppets. Different states of India has their unique forms of puppetry with people involved in the making of these puppets. When brought in the ambit of classroom practice different skills of children can be promoted.

Keywords: Puppetry, Foundational years, Children

Introduction

India as a nation is culturally vibrant. Different states of India has their own art and craft. Puppetry is seen in many states of India like Odisha, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The different forms of puppetry found in India are Shadow puppetry, Rod Puppetry, Glove Puppetry and String puppetry. The association of these different forms of puppetry are with people who are long associated in their making. The themes of these puppets involve different characters from the epics and legends. Particularly they are based on the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Over a period of time the educational values of these different puppets have been realized by people and has been brought in the ambit of curriculum practice. Different characters evil and good are shown through puppets and these can be used to help students understand what evil and good actions are like in the case of Ravana Chhaya the character of Hanuman can be understood for his qualities like devotion. The character of Rama can be understood for his duties and responsibilities. Ravana as a demon king and the win of good over evil is shown through these puppets. Brought within classroom practise the students can be made to make the puppets by themselves like by asking them to select any of the themes and then design the dialogues and then asked to perform the play. This gives them a sense of responsibility and sends the message that they are accepted in the classrooms. Different social skills of children are also developed like how to interact with people in the society etc. Apart from that development of fine motor skills also takes place. Taking into account the diversity of students present in the classrooms and also in a way to work towards creating more inclusive societies it is essential that puppetry finds its proper place in the school curriculum. Almost all the forms of puppetry are prevalent in India. Talking about the holistic

development of children which education is aimed at it is essential that puppetry be chosen as a medium through which all the domains of development like cognitive, affective and psychomotor can be addressed leading to his/her holistic growth.

Research Questions

- i) How can puppetry be used in the classroom?
- ii) What are the different types of puppets that can be used?
- iii) What are the different concepts that can be taught to children through puppets?
- iv) What are the educational values of puppets?

Objectives

- (i) To study the use of different types of puppets in the classrooms.
- (ii) To find out the different puppets that can be used in the classrooms.
- (iii) To find out the different concepts that can be taught through the use of puppets.
- (iv) To explore the educational values of puppetry.

Methodology

The study is done based on secondary source of data. The materials that had been used for the purpose of the study includes government documents etc.

Why use different puppets in the classroom?

Using puppets in the classroom is important due to the following reasons-

- Increases students interest towards learning.
- Different concepts of education can be explained to students.
- To help children imagine during content delivery in classroom.
- Creativity can be increased.
- Students engagement in the classroom is proper.
- Is cheap-can be made from readily available materials.

Who will make the puppets?

If we go by the recommendations that has been made in the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage 2022 we find that they have suggested about different methods of teaching that can be used in the classroom for teaching children at the Foundational stage. The most important role for people associated with teaching at the Foundational stage is to create that kind of classroom situation where the children feel that their works are appreciated. Steps taken earlier are better than suffering being faced in the long term.

What are the core areas of concern seen at the Foundational Level?

- Administrative problems.
- Language barriers.
- Diversity in cultures etc.
- Wide range of diversity seen in the classroom.
- Lack of adequate infrastructural facilities.
- Lack of teacher training.

Why choose mythological characters in the form of puppets ?

National Education Policy 2020 has talked about education being rooted in Indian values and ethos. This necessitates the presence of a curriculum with activities that can help children develop proper understanding of Indian culture. Puppetry as an art form has immense scope to help children develop better understanding of the world and promote the sense of aesthetics which is integral to leading a good life. There are different ways through which we can help children learn in the Foundational years through the introduction of puppets. When we show children Ravana Chhaya then children will understand what kind of values they can imbibe and the cultural essence is also covered.

What can Government do?

Involve Self Help Groups (SHG's) in the making of puppets. Most of the rural women today are becoming self-sufficient through the Self Help Groups (SHG's). Mothers Group in schools can be invited and meetings to be held almost every week. Education being included in the concurrent list means that the states has to play an important role in the functioning of the education system. Through adequate responsibility sharing we can work effectively in alignment with the policy documents. Often it is seen that the reasons for drop out from schools is coupled by a no. of factors. For policy makers and school administration it is essential that regular talk is ensured with their parents so that their suggestions may be taken into account for policy planning. India as a nation is so diverse. Every state has their own demands. Thus it is essential that a pool of resource persons are created who are capable of training teachers to use different teaching methods in the classroom.

Who are the people that can be involved in the making of puppets?

- (i) Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)
- (ii) Self Help Group members
- (iii) People in the villages

With one simple glove puppet so many different concepts can be taught to children to promote Foundational Literacy and Numeracy skills. Incorporating mythological characters is beneficial in so many ways. If we use puppets to explain a story like for example using puppets to explore folklore then children can very well be introduced to the practices being followed in the communities that they belong to which is essential to be an effective member of the society.

Benefits of using puppets in the classroom

i) Cost effectiveness-some of the popular forms of puppetry like string puppets and glove puppets can be easily made in the classrooms. Government in recent times is seen to have given immense importance on promoting art integrated pedagogy and organizations like National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) focusing on it has organized different events like inviting children to showcase region specific cultures. When the importance of Puppetry is introduced to teachers and the students undoubtedly they can work towards creating better classrooms where children not only sit idle but also they learn how to get ready for a vocation.

ii) Working in alignment with policy recommendations-National Education Policy 2020 has talked about promoting experience based learning in the classrooms and using puppetry is one such way through which it can be appropriately done.

iii) Bringing innovations and developing students interest towards learning in the classroom-when students get to make puppets they get to utilize their ideas and in the process develop interest towards learning.

v) Increasing students creativity

vi) Addressing local specific needs-In some form of puppetry local specific themes are also chosen which can definitely help children get introduced to the societies that they belong to.

vii) Addressing cultural differences and

viii) Promoting foundational literacy and numeracy.

Policy document like NIPUN BHARAT has talked in length about competency based learning which involves giving focus to life skills which is so essential to help the child understand the importance of different skills for sustenance. It has also talked about the involvement of different stakeholders in the learning process of the child like Parents, Community, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) etc. Thus it is imperative that puppetry be introduced in the primary classes and teachers are trained in the making of different puppets. Different training programs are to be introduced through which teachers are to be made aware about the different types of puppets that can be used according to region specific needs and demands. The entire focus of the school system should be to help the child become self-sufficient, help him/her get a job, adjust well in the society and become a well-built personality who can contribute to social wellbeing, become financially independent, become an excellent decision maker and also have adequate social adjustment. The beginning of all these are the early stage of life which is the foundational stage.

What to do with puppets?

❖ Introduce children to different adult roles. Introducing children to adult roles in the foundational years is essential to understand responsibility sharing.

❖ Bring mythological characters close to them through puppets.

There are various forms of puppets like glove puppets having attractive miniature structure. Children can be asked to bring different puppets to the classes. NEP 2020 talks about promoting the vocational skills of children. Puppetry is an excellent way through which the vocational skills of children can be promoted in the foundational years. Puppetry is to be made an important part of curriculum planning so that children get an idea about Indian culture. Organisations like Centre for Cultural Resources and Training can play a very important role in this regard. There are several reasons for using puppets in the classrooms. Some of them are-

- Attractive
- Alluring
- Draws student interest towards the subject

Children are naturally attracted towards colours and with the use of expressions, hand modulation, body movement, eye movements and gestures puppets can be used by teachers to help children in the classrooms.

A learning environment can centre around the puppets through resource pooling moving ahead from the way teaching happens through the traditional approach. The clothes for making the puppets can be procured from the tailor shops and also the unused clothes of children can be used in the process as well and thus children's attention can be drawn to the subjects taught.

Community engagement in the learning process of the child can be done when mothers and rural women are involved in the making of different puppets. These also work towards making village women self-sufficient.

Challenges

Some of the challenges are in terms of -

- ❖ Teachers attitude towards the use of puppets in the classroom.
- ❖ Resource paucity
- ❖ Time
- ❖ Finance and
- ❖ Training of people

Using Puppets in the classroom

A number of concepts can be taught by using puppets in the classroom. As for example if we have to help children connect with their surroundings we can make use of any form of puppets that we want.

A classroom based situation would be-

Narrator: the teacher

The Concept: Trees are important for all of us. We get so many things from trees. Saving trees adds to the aesthetic sense of the environment. Characters can be assigned to students. The discussion can follow a sequence like-

Teacher: Do you think trees are important?

Students response: Yes they are.

In this way environmental awareness can be promoted. Concern for the environment and the concept of conscious living with adequate awareness can be promoted along with love for nature. In the process health and hygiene practices can be promoted and also moral values can be imbibed.

Findings and Interpretations

Some of the significant findings of the study are in relation to teachers who can use different Teaching Learning Materials (TLM's) in the classroom. Puppetry is a great pedagogical tool which has every scope to ensure students active participation in the classroom if the teacher is trained in the process to make it happen. It can be used as a resource in the classroom. All the teachers can share their ideas and involve children in the classroom activities. This can help in creating a vibrant classroom environment and also help in better retention and develop values in children promoting the cultural essence in them.

Suggestions

1. Teachers to be properly trained in the use of puppets in the classroom.
2. Resource person of Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) are to be invited to schools.
3. Importance of puppets to be introduced to teachers.
4. Different workshops on puppetry to be conducted in schools.

5. Planning, monitoring and supervision of teachers is essential after training.
6. Financial assistance to be given to schools to organize different programs related to puppets.
7. The linkages can be drawn from the stories being told.
8. Grandparents can be involved and ideas can be shared like how puppetry can be used to promote children's learning through references to different mythological characters.
9. Values can be transferred to children through the depictions of different mythological characters.
10. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy skills can be promoted.

Conclusion

The Foundational Years holds great significance in laying the base of a strong future for children. Thus it is important that better learning spaces are designed for children in which they find ways to express themselves. Teachers play a significant role in this regard as they are the people who know what is best for the child. Puppetry is an excellent way through which children can be taught in a manner in which they enjoy learning. In a way it is also by using puppets in the classroom that the latent abilities of children can also be developed and thus is to be explored by the teachers.

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