

Storytelling as a Tool of Indigenous Pedagogy of Teaching and Learning



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Abstract

The present paper is based upon the on-going Ph.D. research where the researcher has tried to understand as learning aspect of indigenous community. It focuses upon understanding the meaning of storytelling as conceived by the indigenous communities. In context of indigenous communities, oral tradition has remained one of the most predominant aspects of community life. As a consequence, children from indigenous communities have to struggle in learning new knowledge in the formal education system. The teachers who have lesser exposure to indigenous communitarian life rarely utilize storytelling as a tool of teaching and learning these children. As a result, children coming from the indigenous communities have to struggle at umpteen levels to understand the content. This also becomes a reason of poor writing skill among children of indigenous community. In Jharkhand where formal schooling was first introduced by the Christian missionaries during the British colonial era, transition from oral to written culture were done to as process of civilizing the tribal communities. Since, different tribal communities form an important part of the population in Jharkhand, therefore, such issues needs to be comprehensively addressed for the educational well beings of children from indigenous communities. The researcher found that storytelling as a tool of effective pedagogy has lost vital aspects of learning ability which needs effective intervention if learning of the children from indigenous communities broadened.

Keywords: Storytelling, Indigenous Pedagogy, Teaching and Learning, Indigenous Communities.

Introduction

Storytelling approach, towards indigenous knowledge system is the most suitable approach within indigenous epistemology. Bruner (2002) says that 'all of life is a story as it helps us put the pieces of our experiences together'. Analysing the nature of indigenous knowledge from socio-cultural context, it shows that basic ground and historical roots of story-telling makes it a unique body of knowledge. The culture of storytelling is an indigenous teaching learning tool, which is now a days much more popular and familiar in the domain of official knowledge system. Storytelling within oral cultures is not fiction in the same way as it is within literate cultures. These are not "made up stories." They are primary tools for teaching culture, values, and spirituality. People have lived through these experiences, which become the collective memory of a community (Baskin, 2005). In the indigenous communities, even before learning the reading and writing, children starts sharing their ideas through stories. Storytelling in indigenous culture has a long history. Indigenous culture has common beliefs and value system that are communicated through various ways like stories, songs, dance, rituals and ways of being.

In many researches, the origin of storytelling had been identified as need of human society. Some of these are classified as that it's grew out of playful, self-entertainment need of human. Thus, indigenous stories often retain these core aspects of teaching, learning and knowing. It's satisfied the need to explain the surrounding physical world. It is also came about because of intrinsic religious need in human to honour or propitiate the supernatural forces believed to be present in the world. It's also evolved from the need to communicate experience to other humans. It's fulfilled the aesthetic need for beauty, regularity, and a form through expressive language and music. It stemmed from the desire to record actions, or qualities of one's ancestors, in the hope that this would give them a kind of immortality (Pellowski, 1977).

This is why storytelling has been recognized as important factor for the development of children. It helps to make a connection between the past, present and future as one of the important processes of the mind,

which helps a person to get aware about self and make his/ her own identity and existence in the society. Further, it allows children of indigenous communities to make sense of their lives. Making sense of life becomes possible because construction of story and cosmology, which is highly interconnected. Indigenous storytelling pedagogies encourage broader understandings of identity, community, culture, and relations. Community education located in Indigenous storytelling has long been a powerful form of education that enriches the lives of community, creating a sense of interconnectedness between family, community, and nation and with all relations as well as with the spiritual understanding of self and the spirit world (Iseke, 2013).

Aim of the Study

The present paper is based upon the ongoing Ph.D. entitled '*Indigenous knowledge: A study of the ethno pedagogical practices in context of indigenous people of Latahar (Jharkhand)*' where the researcher has tried to understand as learning aspect of indigenous community.

One of the aspects arose while going through the research was to understand ethno-pedagogical practices in context of indigenous people of Latahar district of Jharkhand, India. In the process of data collection storytelling emerged, not only as a tool of teaching and learning, but, more as embedded social-cultural dimension that connects the social life of the indigenous people together.

As far as the *objectives* of the research are concerned, it tries to understand the nature of indigenous knowledge and explore the dichotomy between indigenous knowledge and institutional knowledge. Looking from the educational point of view the research also tries to explore the epistemic value as reflected in indigenous culture and scope for its expansion, retention and restoration of indigenous knowledge. Answering the nature of indigenous knowledge the research explains as to why the indigenous knowledge constitute a separate domain from institutional knowledge? It also elaborate upon its acceptance as compared to institutional knowledge. Further, it goes deeper into its manifestations to understand its pedagogical aspects as reflected in their cultural milieu. Aiming to explain its acquisition the research tries to find out whether indigenous knowledge create any opportunities for broader and abstract concept of learning?

In contexts of the present paper, the *literature reviews* suggests that stories has the ability to make sense about all kind of human activities within cultural contexts. Bruner (2002 P:12) says that stories help in imagination and provide a platform for human thinking process and is perceived as a means of communication which produce ways of meaning making among the participants. He says that '*stories are not just a way of expressing oneself rather also supports to organizing the memories*'.

Further, looking to the importance of indigenous research, the researcher found that storytelling forms an important aspect of exploring the area. In this regard, Linda Tuhiwai Simth (1999)

describes storytelling as an '*essential part of indigenous research*'. She says that for reclaiming indigenous culture, storytelling as an essential part of research is not just a part of entertainment rather it represents a collective worldview among indigenous communities. This is because, as the researcher understands is due to the fact that stories has the power to transfer belief and cultural values from one generation to another. Therefore, stories make connections among past, present and future.

The researcher found stories and storytelling to be quite useful in terms of its utilization as a pedagogical tool in educational institutions and other academic programme. In this regard Livo and Rietz (1986) focuses on the nuances of developing a story, ways to narrate any story, dealing with the issues related with the audience, planning events and so on. The author provides a very pragmatic approach towards storytelling which broadened the cognitive horizon of the researcher. Similarly, Iseke and BMJKW (2011) explores and tries to understand the indigenous pedagogies and practices through the storytelling. In this work, Tom McCallum narrates three stories. Through these stories Tom McCallum explain about the learning pattern and process of meaning making of life. These stories shared among communities are viewed as a powerful pedagogical tool of communication. Narrative of these stories reflects on the role of storytelling within the indigenous communities. The author contends that powerful stories develop better understanding and provide even a complex mindfulness to comprehend easily. Further, a research project conducted in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections by Butcher (2006) with ten participants which included teachers, social workers, parole agents and other professional staff. The research focuses on exploring storytelling/narrative, as a teaching strategy, and how it influences adult learning in a correctional facility. The work concludes that story has a potential to change the student's perspective and motivate peoples to think "out of the box". The researcher understands that this is because story has a characteristic of less abstraction and can easily internalize different viewpoints. The researcher further believes that in stories there are immense possibility for development of critical thinking, verbal communication, interpersonal communication and moral development.

Storytelling as Tool of Teaching and Learning

Storytelling provides a platform, where it works as a meaning making framework for indigenous knowledge system. The indigenous storytelling contains stories that usually have familiar characters, subjects and themes and so on. This is why it helps to internalize, rather than, just memorising the content. Thus, it becomes a part of one's body as well as consciousness in a process of meaning making. (Iseke & BMJK, (2011) says that in the process of hearing the story, we are challenged to understand indigenous knowledge, not just as stories told by elders, but, as stories in our own lives, that helps us to reinterpret our own lives and derive meaning we make with them. Listener therefore, has a responsibility to be active participants in the story, to interpret

meaning. By telling our stories we're at the same time disrupting dominant notions of intellectual rigor and legitimacy, while also redefining scholarship as a process that begins with the self (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). Story telling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control (Smith, 1999). It is assumed that the accepted part of their social life will not only be confined to listening the narrative, but also to perform them adequately. The children in such situation are often just demanding an audience as the adults, because they have had training in listening and narrating in at early age (Pellowski, 1977).

To Learn about Important Aspect of One's Own Culture

The culture of storytelling in indigenous communities creates cultural preservation and maintenance. Through storytelling the culture values and teaching has been transmitted from one generation to the another generation. As stated by many indigenous writers stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further (Smith, 1999). Stories creates a sense of "emotional, symbolic, historic, spiritual and cultural significance for a whole group". It often involves spiritual connections to nature, relationships to other humans in the group, and relations to ancestors whose remains may be in the place. This may be regarded as place attachment for the group (McAvoy, 2002). Earth as a spiritual force is connected to ceremony and storytelling. Storytelling and Indigenous land are both part of the sustaining and resurgence of Indigenous life and are not easily separable. (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). In indigenous community, people have a deep sense of interconnected cultural being who create their story, folklore, in the context of their cultural surrounding. Through storytelling and ceremonial life, we are involved in the life ways of a people, culture, community, family, and tradition, and in it we make a new story today of our connections. Whether our stories are pedagogical or witnessing and therefore have a teaching function or ceremonial and have a spiritual connection, the stories are important to our cultural life (Iseke, 2013).

Peeping through the Historical Frame

Stories as Indigenous knowledge work to not only regenerate Indigenous traditions and knowledge production, but also work against the colonial epistemic frame to subvert and recreate possibilities and spaces for resistance. Indigenous stories affirm that the subjectivity of Indigenous peoples is both politically and intellectually valid. Indigenous stories also proclaim that Indigenous peoples still exist, that the colonial project has been ultimately unsuccessful in erasing Indigenous existence (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). Archibald explains that culture or beliefs are represented as stories. It is stories and the performance of stories through oral traditions of storytelling, folklore, song and dance reinforces the culture and beliefs of the tribe. She states that it is the stories that keep a culture strong and protect it from

outside forces that seek to dismantle it. Constant reconnection with their cultural beliefs maintains aboriginal people's ways of knowing, being and doing alive and healthy. Removed from their stories and culture, they become a disconnected people without their beliefs. Without beliefs they are without their culture and without culture they are without identity (Archibald, 2008). Storytelling as witnessing and remembering allows engagement with ideas of the past and supports transforming ourselves today. Bylearning from stories and storytelling, we are a part of the process of recovering from colonization and its effects and of remaking ourselves. In storytelling, we can become who we are meant to be. In the stories we tell of who we are, where we come from, what we understand, and how we belong, we make ourselves and our connections to our world (Iseke, 2013).

To Direct One's Action

These stories also carry Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, and theories within their narratives; as she states, "It is more than a lesson, a teaching, or even an historical account. Their conscious and knowing agreement directly extends to our philosophies, thoughts and actions. Iseke (2013) says that storytelling provides opportunities to express the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Indigenous languages and nurtures relationships and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges and culture. Similarly, Livo & Rietz, (1986) says that storytelling is a vehicle for binding one together with the past, present and future. Actually, storytelling connects the disconnections of human experience and gives something whole and meaningful to it. It further leads to learn social skill. Butcher (2006) contends that it is a method which enhances discovery of self and others. Whereas, Iseke (2013) says that If we remain open to storytelling, it is a practice through which we can grow for a lifetime. Thus, storytelling is a valuable method of teaching others about life, whether children or adults, storytelling is a process that can be simple for children, with growing complexity for the more deeply knowing, and can be a powerful space for the development of knowledge and skills.

Interconnection between Stories, Language Learning Environment

Indigenous stories can be best express through their own native language. Storytelling is fundamentally focus on dialogue and conversations. When a language is destroyed, many of the stories and spiritual beliefs are gone forever because there is no way to access meanings without the original language that conceived them (Sandri, 2013). Indigenous language reflect within indigenous community as amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to-day indigenous lives. Importantly, storytelling is also about humour and gossip and creativity (Smith, 1999). Indigenous storytelling helps to create a non-threatening, meaningful and sensitive learning environment, which also helps indigenous learner to learn without burden.

Conclusion

To summarize the discourse, the researcher understands that the storytelling as pedagogy of teaching and learning has a huge possibility to explore in the academic contexts. It is considered very easy and a natural way for the communication and social interaction which connects and binds people together. In terms of indigenous pedagogy, it plays a vital role because oral traditions are a dominating factor among indigenous community. Thus, story as a pedagogical tool of teaching and learning suggests that it has potential to act effectively with all age groups of people and have the power to reclaim and redefining the indigenous culture.

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