

LIFE SKILLS AND LANGUAGE: A PRODUCTIVE HARVEST FOR SOCIAL ACTION

G.Sundari

Assistant Professor of English,

Vijaya Institute of Technology for Women,

Vijayawada.

V. Vishnu Vandana Devi

Associate Professor of English,

Vijaya Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences for Women,

Vijayawada.

Abstract:

The ethnic diversity of a country gives the English teacher an opportunity to use stories to train the young learners into responsible citizens, enriching their personal and professional lives with life skills and entrepreneurship abilities. II B.Tech JNTU(K) English textbooks of Explorations-I: Life, Language, and Culture is an anthology of selected stories for the young professionals, designed to develop life skills along with the qualities of concentration, sustained attentiveness, visualization and imagination, apart from enhancing their language skills.

Keywords: Life skills and entrepreneurship abilities, qualities of concentration, sustained attentiveness, visualization and imagination, perspectives towards life.

Introduction

Stories of a country reflect the cultural quintessence of the place and they can be utilized in the Language lab to further the growth of the psyche of a learner, to transform him/her into a righteous human being. Any field of science or technology aims at the wellbeing of the society and the nation at large. What we intend is to put forward the importance of engineering in an ethical backdrop, which suggests that today's engineers are at the threshold of new technological developments and they are in a position to face and overcome the possible threats to take-up the opportunities in the competitive world. As man is an emotional being, human emotions are an indispensable source of ethical insight into one's self. The present-day engineers should incorporate emotional reflection into their engineering, and this calls for a new-fangled understanding of the competencies of engineers because they cannot be devoid of human emotions but at the same time develop their moral sensitivity, in order to be engaged in morally responsible engineering.

The objective of the Study

Storytelling and story writing amazingly enhance the LSRW skills of the learners of all stages, from kindergarten to higher levels of learning. Entertainment and education happen simultaneously, giving way to delight, introspection, and emulation. The creativity of the learner's mind crosses the territories of time, space and culture. Stories also bring in a prospect to the learner to have information about the history and geography of a place. The II B.Tech JNTU(K) English textbook Explorations- I: Life, Language, and culture are designed to nurture the young professionals; the qualities of concentration sustained attentiveness and also to activate their visualization and imagination, apart from enhancing their language skills like vocabulary, idioms, and some literary concepts. The paper, therefore, focuses on the extensive use of the stories from Explorations-I in the language lab, as a very enjoyable way of learning and teaching to improve academic as well as individual abilities of both the learner and teacher respectively.

The JNTU (K) II B.Tech English textbook is a collection of short stories and is devised to develop integrated skills among the student community. The stories focus on the diverse issues related to life, language, and culture of some selected countries. The course book is aimed at introducing young aspirants to life skills. The set of stories, presenting life in its rainbow colors concentrate on enriching human life with all the varied experiences from the narratives and the characters. They uncover the learners the various dimensions of human life like gender, environment, culture, human relationships, ethics, aesthetics, social responsibilities as well as the philosophy of life.

Further, the specific objectives of the book are to enable the learner:

- To understand the various cultures and traditions
 - To understand the inter-personal relationships
 - To be sensitive to issues related to life
- To develop critical and analytical thinking
- To attain confidence to face life in any eventuality. (p.iii)

Text: Samples of analysis

The Festival of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka based on the travelogues of Fa Hien in Explorations-I pick up the culture and traditions followed in Sri Lanka in the light of which learners draw an inference about the rituals practiced in their own country. The questions also focus on the political relationships existing amidst the countries. To mention:

1. The writer notes 'the gesture...strengthened the cultural link between India and Sri Lanka' (Para 4, p.) In what ways are the two countries strengthening their relationship now?
2. How has India contributed to/participated in the spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka?

Such questions turn the attention of the learner's mind not only towards the similarities in culture between the two countries, but also give them a scope to ponder over the need for a healthy and strong relationship among the countries of the world.

Bade Bhai Saab by Munshi Premchand gives an opportunity for students to introspect and self-analyze their strengths and weaknesses, making it easier for them to present themselves at the interviews with greater confidence. Some of the learners could comprehend the relationship between the two brothers. During the classroom discussion, they participated actively and presented their relationships with their siblings, in the most exciting manner. Learners from Telugu medium background also took an initiative to present their feelings. Thus, the activity tested their oral skills.

The Hawk and the Tree by Zaryab, the writer from Afghanistan introduce the students not only to the Afghan culture but also to the attitudes of various social classes and the inherent contradictions and complexities existing in the society proceeding towards modernization. The story is very thought-provoking and moves the thoughts of the learners towards words like

ego, self, and self-esteem and their importance in the making of an individual. The students could realize the class-system, the hierarchy in the society where the weaker section is always dominated by the strong and focus on the issue of unemployment. The culture of Afghanistan of caging hawks at home deliberated them towards thinking about the freedom of the birds and animals kept in captivity. Symbolism has a vital role to play in this story and much meaning is conveyed through the usage of words. When the learners could identify the meaning of the words and phrases, there was silence among them. All the noise and discussion gave in to meditation about basic human nature. Some of the following words and their meanings stirred the minds of the students:

Dead tree - moral apathy among the people

Mute- silence

Sleeping in darkness- ignorance

Lifeless eyes- death

As the discussion progressed towards the reaction of the crowd at the death of the hawk, one of the learners came out with her personal experience:

Last year, when we were at the bus stop as we were going home after college, my friends and me, we saw a road accident. Suddenly, a car came and hit two students who were crossing the road, and one girl died on the spot. No man, woman or student was ready to move the injured girl to the hospital and all of them were showing pity on the girls and they were relaxed that it was not one among them. I can find the same attitude in the people here in the story also.

--- Yagna (II B.Tech C.S.E.)

To Be or Not to Be by Zaheda Hina from Pakistan introduces the students to gender issues and the political philosophy of countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and the like. The theme of the story revolves around a female protagonist who is a journalist and writes against the atrocities of the military government of the country. She is startled to find her husband, a police officer supporting the military government and responsible for the death of her journalist friend, an advocate of human rights.

In the classroom, there was much discussion about human rights and their violation and about freedom of speech and expression. The students could recollect the issue of the young Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Malala, who is raising her voice for the girl child's education. They also tried to open up about the recent Delhi incident and the much debatable aspect of the usage

of social media, the Facebook and the comments of two young girls, lead to the arrest of the same.

Thus, the story focused on the critical and analytical thinking of the students leading towards questioning and striving to find a solution for the problem.

Method

Various activities are given to the students to motivate them towards self-learning and empowerment, as it is the main idea of introducing the text. The learners should read the stories, participate in classroom discussions and then answer the questions, all by themselves. To give them better inputs of the story, Bade Bhai Saab, by Munshi Premchand, the students are made to watch a short film, the Hindi version of the story on the OHP, before they could start with answering the text. The response was amazing as the learners always love to watch films and this film they enjoyed much. The project-work given strengthens the creative and thinking abilities of the learner as he/she is supposed to interview an elderly person, a grandmother or a grandfather to find out the difference in the system of education during their generation and that of today. The learners were very creative in presenting their answers and as they were all girls, they immediately could reflect upon the idea that they are very much privileged in terms of receiving higher education which was denied to the earlier generation. Especially when the girl-students spoke to their grandmothers they could comprehend the advancement in the lifestyle of women. Thus, the activity helped them to understand the differences between the generation of the yesteryears and that of today.

The Cop and the Anthem by O.Henry were available in the form of a short film made and enacted by learners themselves which were quite intelligible for them, where the language of O.Henry was very difficult for them to comprehend. Another famous short story by the same writer, After Twenty Years also was made to be watched by them and they were asked to bring out the similarities in the endings of the two stories, which they could immediately express in their own words.

Literary analysis of the story helped them to understand the theme. The students, after many readings, could analyze the objective of the writer to make the readers realize about the then American government, the life of the unemployed and the attitude of the police working for the government. Soapy, the character was studied very intently and the character could win the sympathy of the students. Activity which included the location of New York and other landmarks on the map was thoroughly enjoyed by them as they felt that they were trying to know

some important places of the country of their dreams, America. The project-work gave them enough space to empathize with the life and hardships of a homeless person.

The course-book featured many language activities for learners in the back-drop of literature. Vocabulary exercises, idioms, writing style, and other such activities made them develop an interest in the language. They could also make use of the Dictionary very often, as they had to comprehend the meaning of the text.

The features of the course-book are as follows:

" Pre-reading activities provide learners with cultural, topical and historical information.

" Journal writing encourages to respond the text.

" Culture points help enriches the course by expanding the versatility of the book.

A student about her love towards stories and English language:

I love reading and listening to stories. Having been born in India, as a child there were always books of Panchatantra and Chandamama at my home. The interesting and moral stories of the Panchatantra and the inquisitive stories of the Chandamama helped me develop as an individual. Besides my personal growth, they also stimulated my interest in the English language. Gradually, as I started reading other storybooks, I kept enhancing my vocabulary and I am still curious to learn new expressions and phrases used in the English language which is really helping me ahead towards my G.R.E.

---Ch.S.Sravani (II B.Tech C.S.E.)

Key factors in the findings

The project-work at the end of the lesson was to speak to an elderly person who has encountered an experience of deep disappointment in life and how the person has tackled it. There was a classroom discussion on the importance of project-works and how the students were benefited from this talk and the following is the view expressed by a student of IIB.Tech (ECE):

The project-works enable us to move out in society and talk to different people. They help us to get an awareness of several existing problems in society. The project work in the lesson To Be or Not to Be made us to know about the experiences of an elderly person and it also moved us to know something about problem-solving, an essential life-skill. As I interviewed a

poor woman who faced many troubles with her drunkard husband and how she got separated from her husband led me to understand that confidence and economic independence are essential for a woman to take on life. The woman is leading her own family by selling vegetables, to support her two children. I could also learn to talk to such people not letting them feel uneasy, self-conscious or uncomfortable. Thus, the activity made us learn about the speaking-skills and I also felt that education is necessary for a woman in the present society.

---Sowmya.B (E.C.E)

The project-works introduced at the end of each story were, in fact, helpful for the students as they could bring out the real talent of the students in expressing their abilities in writing. As the project-works included conducting interviews, the students were made to watch a video of the interview given by Dr. Abdul Kalam to Knowledge@Warton reporter, where they had the opportunity also to observe the importance of teamwork and leadership skills, apart from learning how to conduct an interview. Subsequently, they could present their project-works extremely well. The students were also tested in groups in their speaking abilities as they were also asked to hold a mock-HR interview session in groups of six. This gave them an opportunity to present their activity with more confidence, as they were given enough time for preparation. Some of the weak students also could get motivated and started taking an initiative by playing their roles. Though their performance was not satisfactory, the students were very happy that they could present themselves in English. Their cognition ensured that the arguments presented were thought-provoking and relevant enough to encourage a sustained effort in using the target language.

Technical students and moral responsibility

The technical students perform experiments in the science laboratories to prove a scientific fact. It is said that scientists and engineers should possess a high standard of Ethics because they are the discoverers, inventors, and developers of many technologies, devices and advancements which are put to use not only by them but also by the commoners as well. A scientist's error in reporting a finding from his laboratory can endanger public life and if an engineer fiddles a design from his drawing board, it costs lives. All of us would be concerned about driving across a bridge built by an engineer and hence engineering is an arbiter of life and also death sometimes if it lacks the moral aspect. And so, it is good for the budding engineers to take into account certain principles like Liberty, Justice, and Integrity. In fact, Liberty is the freedom to accomplish what does not damage or harm others; Justice is the right to demand and give what one's actions might have incurred upon and to compensate for the loss; fairness speaks of equal distribution of opportunities and delegation of work in a conflict-stricken society. An

integrated engineer, therefore, bestowed with the qualities of liberty, justice and open-mindedness will certainly dream and strive for the realization of the same, which is perceived in the progress of a nation. It is certainly these principles of ethics, customs, and laws that have been the cornerstones of a well-built system. The experiments which they perform in a language lab makes the students equip themselves with the requisite skills necessary to perform well in the laboratory of life. Thus the audio-visual aids were made use of quite effectively to bring out the inherent potential of the learners.

Engineers would really excel if they uphold and go forward with integrity, honor, and dignity of the Profession for its continuous progression and make the world a better place to live in. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's words should be taken as an inspiration who opined that an engineer should take upon a challenge as an opportunity to enhance one's expertise and it is only the strong-willed who will climb the mountain peaks and swim across the oceans in order to reach their destination in their respective fields. According to Theodore Von Karman, "Scientists study the world as it is; engineers create the world that has never been".

Conclusion

Literature in the classroom thus can be used as a viable tool to kindle the dormant thoughts of the students leading them to form different perspectives towards life.

The stories successfully weave together clear demonstrations on many aspects of social life that are mediated by language to understand the various facets of social dimensions and the role that language plays in our social lives.

According to Leung, Santos, Language use is of significant importance and its centrality processes like: person perception (how we perceive others and vice versa) and impression management (how we strategically vary our talk to affect the perceptions that others have of us), social reasoning, attitudes and prejudice, and aggression and altruism are examined through language that the interpersonal aspects of utterances and the possible role of politeness in language comprehension are achieved by enabling the readers to view familiar perspectives through a social psychological lens.

The learners are encouraged to offer their own interpretation and views of the text, which inevitably made them confident proponents of their text analysis. This certainly helps them to understand and analyze any text in any subject.

Thus, through all its essential features JNTU (K) II B.Tech English text-book, Explorations-I has enabled the harvest of substantial knowledge about Life, Language, and Culture.

References

- Explorations-I, Life, Language, and Culture (2012), Cengage Learning India Pvt.Ltd, Delhi, 2012
- Gert Jan Hofstede, Paul B. Pedersen, Geert Hofstede, (2002). Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories, and Synthetic Cultures.
- www.eslfast.com Easy Conversations for ESL/EFL Beginners