THINK INDIA JOURNAL

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Teaching Economics With Stories For Conceptual Understanding

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ABSTRACT

Children love stories asstories create magic and a sense of wonder. Storytelling is a distinctive way for students to develop anappreciation, respect and understanding for other cultures. Stories can promote a positive attitude towards people from different lands, races and religions. Stories stays with people much longer than facts or statistics. If a instructor becomes an excellent storyteller, he or she can ensure that any concept they teach will be remembered for years to come.Similarly stories can be used as a boost to traditional methods of teaching Economics .It helps students to clench Economic concepts while diversifying readings and instructional methods in the classroom. This paper describes the pedagogical value of short stories, and identifies numerous stories used in the economics classroom in class IX CBSE curriculum

1) INTRODUCTION

Generally Economics is treated as a difficult subject.A constant challenge for teachers of economics is the perception among many students that it is boring, difficult and highly abstract. Such perceptions can operate as a barrier to effective student engagement and can significantly undermine student motivation and learning (Ruder, 2010).This is deeply ironic given the conviction of most economics teachers that economics is very much about analyzing, understanding and explaining the real world. The problem partly lies in the ability of teachers to make useful links between the abstract concepts taught in economics classes and the experience of their students. These teachers may also lack adequate pedagogical resources to makes these links. For this Watts and Smith (1989) and others have also documented the effectiveness of storytellingto enhance the applicability of economics and motivate students. Life itself is full of stories: stories told to inform, entertain, appreciate, stories about happiness, sadness and many more(Roslan 2008).Then why can't story telling be used as a tool in teaching and learning in Economics .Stories can be a powerful tool if used effectively across the curriculum.

2. KEYWORD DEFINED -

Storytelling is defined in many different ways. Gere (2002) defines storytelling as "the act of using language and gesture in colorful ways to create scenes in a sequence" .Yet another definition states, "storytelling is a compelling method of sharing experiences in order to make sense of our world. Stories build kinship, allow a glimpse into other people's lives and perhaps let us see ourselves in a story" (Kozlovich, 2002). According to McDrury and Alterio (2003), Storytelling is uniquely a human experience that enables us to convey, through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the world, real or imagined, that we inhabit. Stories enable us to know this world and our place in them given that we are all, to some degree, constituted by stories: Stories about ourselves, our families, friends and colleagues, our communities, our cultures, our place in history. Stories teach us about life, about ourselves and about others. Knowing that Economics is the study of world around us ,storytelling can also be effective in teaching Economics .The typical brevity and intensity of short stories make them especially effective at conveying economic principles, offering students a pleasant surprise in the syllabus, and demonstrating the ubiquity of economic concepts. The emotional power of a short story can also provide students with a sense of the importance and complexity of an economic issue which might otherwise appear distant and abstract. In addition, active learning exercises based on short stories can lead to small group class discussions and to enhanced student

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ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

understanding of important points sometimes left out .Because most children enjoy stories teaching economics with them motivates students. This paper documents the experience of the present author in making use of stories in her own teaching in an Economics Class.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

- **General stories** -Storytelling is one of the oldest methods of communicating ideas and learning (Mello, 2001). Many cultures throughout history told stories in a variety of ways; they all used stories as a form of communicating meaning and were a means for teaching and learning. (Meyer &Bogdan, 2001).Stories were told to model values and behaviors, to explain the purpose of mankind, to celebrate rituals and ceremonies, and for elders to share their knowledge with the community (Koki, 1998)Oral and written stories (both through text and pictures) are used as teaching and learning tools. Storytelling is prevalent in our education system (Mello, 2001). The Department of Education (1986) recognizes storytelling as a valuable teaching and learning tool, "Storytelling can ignite the imagination of children, giving them a taste for where books can take them. The excitement of storytelling can make reading and learning fun and can instill a sense of wonder about life and learning" (Bendt& Bowe, 2000). Storytelling is a process where students personalize what they learn and construct their own meaning and knowledge from the stories they hear and tell. Shank (1990) states, we easily remember what other people have said if they tell it in the form of story.Storytelling is not only used for communication purposes, but storytelling has been used to teach literacy skills, cooperative learning skills, critical thinking, and to build knowledge of different contexts (Mello, 2001). Mello (2001) describes storytelling enhance the students' abilities to reflect and develop relationships between the texts, teller, and themselves. As a result, these relationships support and amplify students' comprehension and interactions with others." As students create their new knowledge from a story, they enhance and apply critical thinking skills. Mello (2001) states, "The telling of traditional texts in educational environments raised student consciousness and enriched their lives by engaging them in thinking critically and deeply about social issues". Students have the opportunity to think critically about social issues and author/audience relationships.
- **Stories based on Economic concepts**-Senesh (1964) in his book "The Working World"stressed the use of children's stories as a vehicle for illustrating economic concepts. He argued that basic concepts could be taught through simple stories that related to practical issues in the routine life of a child. he used stories specifically written for economics in his classes.Children's stories written by Maria Edgeworth in the early 19th century contained a rich set of economic themes. Stories such as "The Cherry Orchard" (about the division of labor),"The Purple Jar" (about consumer choices), and "Lazy Lawrence" (about work and saving) served as models for economics education(Henderson, 1995).The popular Berenstain Bear series (1984-2001) includes TheBerenstain Bears and Mama's New Job, that talks about Mother Bear's decision to re-turn to work, The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, MadToy Craze tells about a fad in the goods market, andThe Berenstain Bears' Dollarsand Sense describes about the value of money and the role of banks. Rodgers, Yana & Hawthorne, Shelby & Wheeler, Ron. (2007). Explains in their paper that a good story helps students to remember key points, teachers can use picture books and easy readers with economics content to teach reading and economics simultaneously. Review of children's literature makes it clear that teachers, when choosing their materials for read-a -loud, mini lessons, and reading instruction, should choose interesting books with an economics focus

4. The rationale for using stories

The rationale for stories and storytelling can be summarized as follows:

- **Stories used as a teaching method**-First of all, traditional Gurukala and Harikatha styles of instruction and storytelling have been widely used in India long ago, well before western education influenced the education system (Mercer, 1995). Mercer (1995) explains that the storyteller (guru) would explain texts to the students, who did

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ISSN:0971-1260
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most of the learning by rote and this method was intended to provide students with access to knowledge.

- **As a stimulus to other learning &activity** -Thirdly, stories are not only used as a tool forteaching and learning but can also is regarded as a stimulus to other learning and activity. For example stories can lead into dance, drama, art, design, scientific investigations or other different kinds of activities. There will be several examples of how stories can be used as a stimulus to other kinds of activities that will be described in a later section of this essay.
- **Engagement in creative and imaginative learning**- stories can be used in teaching ideas as they provide a way for children and teachers to engage in creative and imaginative learning (Mallan, 1991). Wells (1986) argued that when we use stories to teach children about a particular idea or concept, it is readily accepted by the young children and they will find it easier to assimilate new ideas when they are presented within the framework of a story. Wells (1986) believed that "stories provide a major route to understanding".
- **Help develop positive attitude towards teachers and schools**-When children are exposed to stories early, for example starting from home, they may develop positive attitudes towards teachers and schools because stories are readily accepted by childrenfrom theearly years. Barton and Booth (1990) claimedthat "stories are themost effective means of establishing that great line known as rapport".

5. STORIES TAKEN FROM NCERT BOOK RECOMMENDED BY CBSE FOR CLASS IX ECONOMICS

Following Stories, shown in Table 1, were taken from NCERT book recommended by CBSE for class IX Economics. Each story was discussed with the students in the class and given questions was discussed out of every story.

CHAPTER I- STORY OF VILLAGE PALAMPUR		
STORY NO.	Short stories	Questions discussed
1.	*Dala is a landless farm labourer who works on daily wages in Palampur. This means he must regularly look for work. The minimum wages for a farm labourer set by the government is Rs 60 per day, but Dala gets only Rs 35–40. There is heavy competition for work among the farm labourers in Palampur, so people agree to work for lower wages. Dala complains about his situation to Ramkali, who is another farm labourer. Both Dala and Ramkali are among the poorest people in the village.*	1. Why are farm labourers like Dala and Ramkali poor? 2. How much money do they get to work? 3. What is the minimum wages set by the government ? 4. Why do people agree to work on low wages ?
2	*Savita is a small farmer. She plans to cultivate wheat on her 1 hectare of land. Besides seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, she needs cash to buy water and repair her farm instruments. She estimates that the working capital itself would cost a minimum of Rs 3,000. She doesn't have the money, so she decides to borrow from Tejpal Singh, a large farmer. Tejpal Singh agrees to give Savita the loan at an interest rate of 24 per cent for four months, which is a very high interest rate. Savita also has to promise to work on his field as a farm labourer during the harvest season at Rs 35 per day. As you can tell, this wage is quite low. Savita*	1. What does Tejpal Singh do with his earnings? 2. What are the resources required by savita for farming? 3. Why is getting a loan tough for a small farmer? 4. Why do savita agrees to work on low wages? 5. What is the family size

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	knows that she will have to work very hard to complete harvesting on her own field, and then work as a farm labourer for Tejpal Singh. The harvest time is a very busy time. As a mother of three children she has a lot of household responsibilities. Savita agrees to these tough conditions as she knows getting a loan is difficult for a small farmer	of savita ?
3	*Mishrilal has purchased a mechanical sugarcane crushing machine run on electricity and has set it up on his field. Sugarcane crushing was earlier done with the help of bullocks, but people prefer to do it by machines these days. Mishrilal also buys sugarcane from other farmers and processes it into jaggery. The jaggery is then sold to traders at Shahpur. In the process, Mishrilal makes a small profit.*	• What capital did Mishrilal need to set up his jaggery manufacturing unit? • Who provides the labour in this case? • Can you guess why Mishrilal is unable to increase his profit? • Could you think of any reasons when he might face a loss? • Why does Mishrilal sell his jaggery to traders in Shahpur and not in his village?
4	*Kareem has opened a computer class centre in the village. In recent years a large number of students have been attending college in Shahpur town. Kareem found that a number of students from the village are also attending computer classes in the town. There were two women in the village who had a degree in computer applications. He decided to employ them. He bought computers and set up the classes in the front room of their house overlooking the market. High school students have started attending them in good numbers.*	1. In what ways is Kareem's capital and labour different from Mishrilal's? 2.Why didn't someone start a computer centre earlier? Discuss the possible reasons
5	*Kishora is a farm labourer. Like other such labourers, Kishora found it difficult to meet his family's needs from the wages that he received. A few years back Kishora took a loan from the bank. This was under a government programme which was giving cheap loans to poor landless households. Kishora bought a buffalo with this money. He now sells the buffalo's milk. Further, he has attached a wooden cart to his buffalo and uses it to transport various items. Once a week, he goes to the river Ganga to bring back clay for the potter. Or sometimes he goes to Shahpur with a load of jaggery or other commodities. Every month he gets some work in transport. As a result, Kishora is able to earn more than what he used to do some years back.*	1. What is Kishora's fixed capital? 2. What do you think would be his working capital? 3. In how many production activities is Kishora involved? 4. Would you say that Kishora has benefitted from better roads in Palampur

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Chapter II- PEOPLE AS RESOURCES

	STORIES	QUESTIONS DISCUSSED
6.	*There were two friends Vilas and Sakal living in the same village Semapur. Sakal was a twelve-yearold boy. His mother Sheela looked after domestic chores. His father ButaChaudhary worked in an agricultural field. Sakal helped his mother in domestic chores. He also looked after his younger brother Jeetu and sister Seetu. His uncle Shyam had passed the matriculation examination, but, was sitting idle in the house as he had no job. Buta and Sheela were eager to teach Sakal. They forced him to join the village school which he soon joined. He started studying and completed his higher secondary examination. His father persuaded him to continue his studies. He raised a loan for Sakal to study a vocational course in computers. Sakal was meritorious and interested in studies from the beginning. With great vigour and enthusiasm he completed his course. After some time he got a job in a private firm. He even designed a new kind of software. This software helped him increase the sale of the firm. His boss acknowledged his services and rewarded him with a promotion*	1. What role did the parents of sakal played in his life? 2. What is the family size of sakal ?
7.	*Vilas was an eleven-year old boy residing in the same village as Sakal. Vilas's father Mahesh was a fisherman. His father passed away when he was only two years old. His mother Geeta sold fish to earn money to feed the family. She bought fish from the landowner's pond and sold it in the nearby mandi. She could earn only Rs 20 to 30 a day by selling fish. Vilas became a patient of arthritis. His mother could not afford to take him to the doctor. He could not go to school either. He was not interested in studies. He helped his mother in cooking and also looked after his younger brother Mohan. After some time his mother fell sick and there was no one to look after her. There was no one in the family to support them. Vilas, too, was forced to sell fish in the same village. He like his mother earned only a meagre income*	1. Do you notice any difference between the two friends? What are those? 2. Do you think poverty creates a vicious circle? 3. What circumstances in life lead vilas towards poverty?

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8.	*Story of a Village There was a village inhabited by several families. Each family produced enough to feed its members. Each family met its needs by the members making their own clothes and teaching their own children. One of the families decided to send one of its sons to an agriculture college. The boy got his admission in the nearby college of agriculture. After some time he became qualified in agroengineering and came back to the village. He proved to be so creative that he could design an improved type of plough, which increased the yield of wheat. Thus a new job of agroengineer was created and filled in the village. The family in the village sold the surplus in a nearby neighboring village. They earned good profit, which they shared among themselves. Inspired by this success all the families after some time held a meeting in the village. They all wanted to have a better future for their children too. They requested the panchayat to open a school in the village. They assured the panchayat that they would all send their children to school. The panchayat, with the help of government, opened a school. A teacher was recruited from a nearby town. All the children of this village started going to school. After sometime one of the families gave training to his daughter in tailoring. She started stitching clothes for all the families of the village for everyone now wanted to buy and wear well-tailored clothes. Thus another new job, that of a tailor was created. This had another positive effect. The time of the farmers in going far for buying clothes was saved. As the farmers spent more time in the field, the yield of the farms went up. This was the beginning of prosperity. The farmers had more than they could consume. Now they could sell what they produced to others who came to their village markets. Over time, this village, which formally had no job opportunities in the beginning, had many like teacher, tailor, agro– engineer and many more.*	1. How the story of a simple village evolved into a place rich with complex and modern economic activities? 2. How can inputs like education and health help in making people an asset for the economy? 3. Can you imagine some other village which initially had no job opportunities but later came up with many?

CHAPTER III-POVERTY

	STORIES	QUESTIONS DISCUSSED
9.	*Thirty-three year old Ram Saran works as a daily-wage labourer in a wheat flour mill near Ranchi in Jharkhand. He manages to earn around Rs 1,500 a month when he finds employment, which is not often. The money is not enough to sustain his family of six— that includes his wife and four children aged betweem 12 years to six months. He has to send money home to his old parents who live in a village near Ramgarh. His father a landless labourer, depends on Ram Saran and his brother who lives in Hazaribagh, for sustenance. Ram Saran lives in a one-room rented house in a crowded basti in the outskirts of the city. It's a temporary shack built of bricks and clay tiles. His wife Santa Devi, works as a part time maid in a few houses and manages to earn another Rs 800. They manage a meagre meal of dal and rice twice a day, but there's*	1. Why Ram Saran is not able to find employment throughout the year 2. Who all are working in the family of ramsaran ? 3. What is the position of children in this story? 4. Why some children are forced into child labour ?

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ISSN:0971-1260
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	never enough for all of them. His elder son works as a helper in a tea shop to supplement the family income and earns another Rs 300, while his 10- year-old daughter takes care of the younger siblings. None of the children go to school. They have only two pairs of hand-me-down clothes each. New ones are bought only when the old clothes become unwearable. Shoes are a luxury. The younger kids are undernourished. They have no access to healthcare when they fall ill.	5. Which basisc facilities are not available to the people in this story 6. What are the reasons for thos family being poor?
10.	*Rural case Lakha Singh belongs to a small village near Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. His family doesn't own any land, so they do odd jobs for the big farmers. Work is erratic and so is income. At times they get paid Rs 50 for a hard day's work. But often it's in kind like a few kilograms of wheat or dal or even vegetables for toiling in the farm through the day. The family of eight cannot always manage two square meals a day. Lakha lives in a kuchha hut on the outskirts of the village. The women of the family spend the day chopping fodder and collecting firewood in the fields. His father a TB patient, passed away two years ago due to lack of medication. His mother now suffers from the same disease and life is slowly ebbing away. Although, the village has a primary school, Lakha never went there. He had to start earning when he was 10 years old. New clothes happen once in a few years. Even soap and oil are a luxury for the family.*	1. What type of work is done by the family of lakhasingh for survival 2. Is the family size of this family responsible for their vulnerability? 3. What is the work done by females of the family? 4. Why was lakhasingh not able to go to the school?

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ISSN:0971-1260
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11.	*Story of SivaramanSivaraman lives in a small village near Karur town in Tamil Nadu. Karur is famous for its handloom and powerloom fabrics. There are a 100 families in the village. Sivaraman an Aryunthathiyar (cobbler) by caste now works as an agricultural labourer for Rs 50 per day. But that's only for five to six months in a year. At other times, he does odd jobs in the town. His wife Sasikala too works with him. But she can rarely find work these days, and even if she does, she's paid Rs 25 per day for the same work that Sivaraman does. There are eight members in the family. Sivaraman's 65 year old widowed mother is ill and needs to be helped with her daily chores. He has a 25-year-old unmarried sister and four children aged between 1 year to 16 years. Three of them are girls, the youngest is a son. None of the girls go to school. Buying books and other things for school-going girls is a luxury he cannot afford. Also, he has to get them married at some point of time so he doesn't want to spend on their education now. His mother has lost interest in life and is just waiting to die someday. His sister and elder daughter take care of the household. Sivaraman plans to send his son to school when he comes of age. His unmarried sister does not get along with his wife. Sasikala finds her a burden but Sivaraman can't find a suitable groom due to lack of money. Although the family has difficulty in arranging two meals a day, Sivaraman manages to buy milk once in a while, but only for his son.*	1. What discrimination is done against women in the story? 2. What skill sivaram need to learn to haven an regular employment according to his place of stay? 3. Which societial evil is also depicted in the story? 4. What is the root cause of the problems of this family?

CHAPTER IV- FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

Story No.	STORY	QUESTIONS DISCUSSED
11.	*Story of RamuRamu works as a casual labourer in agriculture in Raipur village. His eldest son Somu who is 10 years old also works as a pali to look after the cattle of the Sarpanch of the village Satpal Singh. Somu is employed for the whole year by the Sarpanch and is paid a sum of Rs 1,000 for this work. Ramu has three more sons and two daughters but they are too young to work on the field. His wife Sunhari is also (part time) working as house cleaner for the livestock, removing and managing cow dung. She gets ½ litre milk and some cooked food along with vegetables for her daily work. Besides she also works in the field along with her husband in the busy season and supplements his earnings. Agriculture being a seasonal activity employs Ramu only during times of sowing, transplanting and harvesting. He remains unemployed for about 4 months during the period of plant consolidation and maturing in a year. He looks for work in other activities. Some times he gets employment in brick laying or in construction activities in the village. By all his efforts, Ramu is able to earn enough either in cash or kind for him to buy*	1. Why is agriculture a seasonal activity? 2. Why is Ramu unemployed for about four months in a year? 3. What does Ramu do when he is unemployed? • Who are supplementing income in Ramu's family? 4. Why does Ramu face difficulty when he is unable to have work? 5. When is Ramu food insecure?

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	essentials for two square meals for his family. However, during the days when he is unable to get some work, he and his family really face difficulties and sometimes his small kids have to sleep without food. Milk and vegetables are not a regular part of meals in the family. Ramu is food insecure during 4 months when he remains unemployed because of the seasonal nature of agriculture work.	
12	*Story of Ahmad Ahmad is a rickshaw puller in Bangalore. He has shifted from JhumriTaliah along with his 3 brothers, 2 sisters and old parents. He stays in a jhuggi. The survival of all members of his family depends on his daily earnings from pulling rickshaw. However, he does not have a secured employment and his earnings fluctuate every day. During some days he gets enough earning for him to save some amount after buying all his day-to-day necessities. On other days, he barely earns enough to buy his daily necessities. However, fortunately, Ahmad has a yellow card, which is PDS Card for below poverty line people. With this card, Ahmad gets sufficient quantity of wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene oil for his daily use. He gets these essentials at half of the market price. He purchases his monthly stock during a particular day when the ration shop is opened for below poverty people. In this way, Ahmad is able to eke out his survival with less than sufficient earnings for his big family where he is the only earning member*	1. Does Ahmad have a regular income from rickshaw-pulling? 2. Why he does not have a regular income? 3. How does the yellow card help Ahmad run his family even with small earnings from rickshaw-pulling? 4. What are the things he is getting from ration depot?

6. STUDENT FEEDBACK

Student satisfaction with modules that included stories and with the content of the stories themselves, offer some evidence of the positive effect of including them in economics classes. Student ratings for lessons designedin Economics with Stories was overwhelmingly positive. Of all students completing evaluations for this course, 91 percent strongly agreed and 9 percent agreed with the statement that the "Instructor taught the course well". When asked to comment on the story readings used in this course, students provided overwhelmingly positive feedback. Almost all students praised the stories for "providing a strong source of real-world economic examples," as one student put it. Also common were comments such as: "I think the stories were the best pieces we read in class. I enjoyed reading them because they were leading to better understanding." A second broad summary statement on the evaluation form was: "The course was a positive intellectual experience." Half the students strongly agreed with this statement, 38percent agreed, and 12 percent slightly agreed. Comments such as: "really liked the story mix on such a dry topic"; and "interesting to see economics in the different plays, stories, and poems" were typical of open-ended student responses to the course. Such feedback echoes the positive student reactions described by Watts and Smith (1989) and justifies further experimentation.

7. CONCLUSION

The story offers economics instructors and their students a powerful device to illustrate economic concepts .The possible responses to the statements on the evaluations are "strongly agree," "agree," "slightly agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." Whether as supplements to otherwise traditional economics courses or as part of non-traditional economics, stories, focused on economic concepts.Economic concepts were packed into

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ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

short, enjoyable, and accessible stories. Stories establish the connection between the concepts of Economics and the world surrounding the students in such a manner that textbook reading and even periodical articles often cannot. Class discussions focused on stories often succeed in drawing out contributions from quiet or struggling students who might learn from a story what they cannot glean from an economics text, lecture, or class discussion. Positive student feedback on modules using short stories in economics class room justify further efforts to experiment with such modules and to carefully measure their impact on student learning of economics. There are benefits that students can gain from being exposed to stories and storytellingin theEconomics classroom. These benefitsare beyondthe levelof entertainmentand ranges from positive social, emotional, cultural and intellectual benefits. However, stories and storytelling also have several limitations. These limitations could be reduced if Economics teachers are careful with the selection of stories used in the purpose of economics learning. Stories and storytelling should not be used as the only method in the Economics classrooms but they couldbe apowerful and pervasive tool ifused effectivelyin the hands of theEconomics teacher. Perhaps, it is best to say here that using stories may work to complement other teaching approaches in Economics classroom.

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