Why is Storytelling Important in Schools and in General Social Life?

Storytelling has been an important part of education for Afghan children for as long as anyone knows. Storytelling is an important way for parents and grandparents to give children an understanding of moral values and practical concerns. Storytelling also helps children develop their imagination by describing to them scenes and situations which are wonderful, magical and unusual. Careful use of stories in teaching children can both help them to understand and deal with life's difficulties, and also give them relaxation and fun, which is very important in building their spirits and strengthening their interest in learning new things.

Afghan culture has a great wealth of stories concerned with religion, history, and moral values. Afghan stories give children a detailed picture of life in Afghanistan, including sights and experiences which are not available to refugees in Pakistan. Before children have learned to read and write, story-learning has taught them to remember and organize information.

In summary, storytelling develops at least three important aspects of a child's mental development:

1) memory and organization of information and use of language
2) morals, ethics, and religious understanding,
3) imagination and the ability to envision events and situations which they have not themselves seen.

Stories at Home and in School

Although most people in the past heard stories at home or from friends (both children and adults enjoyed stories at home), stories have also been important in schools and mosques, where stories of the Prophets, saints and other important figures of history are told. In these times, people at home may not feel ready to tell stories for fun. For this reason, it is even more important to introduce children to stories and storytelling in school. If children do not learn
tell stories and how to use them for understanding when they are young, they will not have the ability and knowledge to use stories to teach their own children important social information when they themselves become parents. Storytelling is an important way to teach children what it means to be Muslim and Afghan, and it is also generally important in teaching children how to think, and encouraging them to struggle to overcome obstacles, as many of the heroes in stories must do.

**Different Types of Stories**

There are many different types of stories. Some of them are:

1) fables and animal tales: 

These provide examples of good and bad, wise and silly, behavior in interactions of animals who act like people, or of people who are representing general types of persons. Many such stories can be found in Persian literature (Kalila wa Dimna ـ ـ and other collections.)

2) jokes and funny stories

Many of these stories, such as stories of Mulla Nasrud-din, "ـ ـ " contain important ideas about good and bad or wise and foolish behavior also.

3) chain tales

These stories are often loved by very young children (aged 2-5). They tell of a series of actions. Action by one character causes the next character to do something, and that action in turn makes a third character do some. They, etc. These stories give very young children practice in thinking about causes and effects, and how one action causes another. Although these stories often seem very silly and far-fetched, they are very interesting to young children because young children are very concerned with coming to understand causes and effects. It is highly important for them to learn that their actions cause the actions of others, good and bad.
4) Afsānah (اَفْسَنَةٌ) or wonder tales.

Although these stories are told mostly for fun, and called "fairy" imaginary stories because they are full of unreal and impossible, magical scenes and actions, they are important for children and adults. The hero usually succeeds after very difficult struggles, so the child is encouraged to try to struggle and succeed. The hero begins the struggle as a poor or lost soul. Both boys and girls can be heroes. Along the way they are helped by good people for example fairies for animals and they usually manage to do away with some bad people. Although Afsānah are not "true", they are full of important social ideas. Imaginary scenes are also important in helping children learn to conceive of actions and events they have never seen or done. Ideas like electricity, flying, etc. are easier for children to take in if they have good imaginations. Afsānah helps develop the imagination. (They also have vivid scenes of everyday Afghan life and customs.)

5) historical stories

It is extremely important that children learn Afghan history and learn to connect it with world history. Afghanistan has been very important in world history in the past, just as it has been important in recent years. (Expanded in archeology, history, arts, etc.)

6) religious stories

Religious stories about the Prophet and important Muslim figures (fighters, teachers, saints) have always been of great interest and importance. Morality and the importance of Islam in world history, and the proper behavior of Muslims are taught in these stories. Religious heroes have also struggled against terrible odds for the sake of their values. Religious stories teach children that material life and success are not the most important things, and that mere survival of the individual is not necessarily the most important goal. There are things beyond the life of the individual which
must be fought for. Fighting for them gives meaning to our individual lives.

How to Use Stories in School

1) Telling Stories to Children

Good stories themselves are most attractive to children. A teacher should always start with the story, not with explanations. A teacher may establish a story time in class. It is also very valuable if the teacher can see opportunities to bring up little stories (J®) when she sees a child doing some action which requires comment. With stories, the teacher can make a comment or evaluation that the child can take to heart. Sometimes this is more effective than direct comment or criticism. This is the way many stories are told to children and adults in daily life.

At the established story hour, the teacher can first tell the story, then follow up with questions to the children, to help guide their understanding. The questions can fall into different areas:

1) Start with questions to make sure the children understand the action in the story. “What happened first? Then what happened? What did the hero do then?” There are questions of fact or content. Make sure the children have an accurate general understanding of the story’s events and the final outcome.

Then

2) Ask the children for their opinions about the actions and the people in the story: “Was this a good action or a bad action? Why? Was this a good person or a bad person? Was this a foolish action or a wise action? If this was a foolish action, what would be the wise thing to do instead?”

3) For more advanced students, you might be able to ask them if the actions of people in the story remind them of actions or events they have seen in real life. Especially if you are telling Afghan or other
Stories with unreal events in them, this would be a time to discuss with children what is realistic and what is imagination or fiction. For more advanced children, the connection of stories to daily moral life and its questions can be explored. (Questions might be like this:
1) "Can people really fly through the air? By what means?"
2) "Do people really turn into stones or animals?" (If there are such events in the stories you have told.)
3) "In this story, the hero was kind to an old person he met, and later that person helped the hero in turn. Does that remind you of anything you have seen in your own life?"

Thus the teacher can help the child to see connections and differences between the story and real life, both in the area of facts and in the area of moral relationships.

The teacher should be careful not to ask too many questions. She should only keep asking questions.

2. Teaching Children to Tell Stories

Story hour in school can also give children a chance to tell stories they have learned at school or at home. This lets the children practice their language and memory skills. The teacher can find out how well the child has understood stories heard in class, and also can find out the child's general level of skills, how much he or she is able to organize stories heard elsewhere. Story hour should give each child a chance to perform, and practice, even if not every child is equally able to finish a story. If one child cannot finish the story, another child might be able to take it up. This sort of cooperative storytelling often happens in the home when young children are just learning to tell stories. Adults also help each other to remember stories. It is very good for children to learn helping, not competitive, behavior. Both children should be thanked for their efforts. Children should not be criticized if they are unable to tell a story perfectly.
Asking questions after the child has finished the story can also help build the child's own understanding and ability to explain things clearly. If the teacher asks questions after a child's story, just as she asks questions after telling her own story, the child is encouraged to think that his or her words are important, too. This builds self-respect and self-discipline in the child. But again, the teacher should be careful not to go on questioning if the children begin to lose interest. Too much questioning can "kill" a story and make the children become bored. The value of stories for teaching is in the great interest, delight and close attention that children will have if they are told in a lively manner.

Children should also be encouraged to take stories home to tell their brothers and sisters, and to bring to school stories they have heard at home. This will help to restore storytelling to the important place it has had in family and home teaching of children in Afghanistan.

Nagasti - Geshti:
3) Art - Stories - Illustrated Stories

a) Age 2 - 5: Tell a story using an uncolored illustration, give each copies of the illustrations to color after story-telling.

b) Age 6 - up: Give each blank paper if desired/colored, equipment to asks students to draw some scene or characters from the story.

This coloring or drawing exercise may be substituted for the question-and-answer session after a story is told, to vary the lesson format.
Name of Story

Type of Story - Animal, Religious, Fairy tale

Characters in the Story

Main message of the story.

Questions to Children

Teachers observations/ Evaluation

Was this a good story for children? Why/ why not? Was it age appropriate? 

Understand if entertaining

What do children learn from this story?

Explain why important

What does this teach children about Islamic/Afghan life, culture and values?

Had any of the children heard this story at home before? Was it the same or somewhat different? Who tells it at home?
Did the children understand the story – able to answer the teachers’ questions?

Could any of the children re-tell the story if?

Did any of the children ask questions about the story or make comments about it?
A. Of memory as a tool to excercise practice - Logic, Geography, Arithmitic
Q. Of imperative. Core "The teachers must..." - Assumptions
Q. Of teaching methods of specific topics and as illustration...