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ABSTRACT

A study was devised to test the effectiveness of storytelling in transmitting information about other cultures. A story containing information about marriage customs and burial traditions in India was presented either by a class instructor, on audio tape, or on video tape to the 47 undergraduate students who served as subjects. Analyses of gains between a prequestionnaire and a postquestionnaire which were administered showed that all three modes of presentation produced significant learning of the material.
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STORYTELLING
AS A METHOD OF COMMUNICATING INFORMATION
ABOUT OTHER CULTURES

An Experimental Study

by

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The art of storytelling is a part of the culture of the peoples in almost every society. They have used its techniques to educate their people in their culture, and values, and customs since the beginning of time. Even today in African and in Asian societies, it is used to educate and inform the people about their cultural values.

Ancient Hindus, Buddhists, Greeks, Romans, Moslems, Christians--all have passed down their cultural heritage by means of storytelling. And today, in societies where mass media are not dominate, oral storytelling is a very effective technique. Bearing this in mind, the governments in these societies use the highly developed art of storytelling to give information about modern technology.

The School of Folklore at the University of Indiana is providing an interesting field of study in the area of folklore. Not too many experimental studies have been done, however, to investigate the value of storytelling as a method of communicating information about other cultures, or about our own. The purpose of the study represented in this paper was to test whether storytelling could be an effective technique of transmitting information about other cultures.

The Methodology

The purpose of this experimental study was to test the effectiveness of storytelling in transmitting information about other cultures. For the purpose of this project the information selected was based on social norms such as marriage customs and burial traditions in India. The information was planted in a story. Three methods were used as means of communication: classroom, radio, and television.

The Sample

The sample for the experiment consisted of students of three undergraduate classes: Speech-Communication 231, 261, and 333. The total sample size was 47. (SpCom 231 = 17; SpCom 261 = 16; SpCom 333 = 14)

The Content

The story selected was titled The Corpse Bearer and was written by an Indian author in the Kannada language. This story was translated into English by the original writer so that the flavor of the Kannada language was retained. This story, published originally in 1959, was judged to be the best story of the year in that language by a most prominent short story magazine in India.

The life of a young man who was a corpse bearer in India is depicted in the story. The profession of corpse bearer is looked down on by most people in the Indian society. Even if

he had the potential to be a loving husband and father, no parents would like to see their daughter married to a corpse bearer. The story furnishes authentic information concerning such a man, his efforts to find a place in society for himself, and also social customs related to marriage, disease, death, and burial rites.

The story was read and taped by this researcher. Since no radio station was available on campus for the purpose of this experiment, the tape was played instead of the radio.

The same story was read by the same researcher on video tape at the ETV facilities.

The Questionnaire

Questions were formulated on the basis of the content of the story. These were about cultural factors related to marriage customs, social status of corpse bearer, religious information about Hinduism, diseases, and burial rites. Questions were also designed to collect the demographic data about the students.

The Experiment

Questionnaires were administered before and after the experiment in order to test the gains of information as a result of this experiment.

This researcher read the story to the students of SpCom 231. The same day, the tape was played for the students of SpCom 333. The same day the video tape was shown on closed

circuit TV to students of SpCom 261.

The pre-test questionnaires were administered before the experiment. The post-test questionnaires were administered shortly after the experiment. The story reading took approximately thirty minutes in each instance.

Analysis of Data

The answers, related to the social customs, were scored on the basis of the bits of information planted in the contents. The maximum points possible for each question were 9.

The answers were coded. The coded data were computed and analyzed to test the significance of information gained as a result of the experiment.

The level of significance was set at .05.

The t test was applied to test the significances.

The gain was significant in all three cases.

The following table gives the statistics:

Medium	N	Pre-test \bar{X}	Post-test \bar{X}	Gain \bar{X}	t Value
Radio	15	4.45	7.36	2.91	1.753
TV	14	1.28	5.82	4.54	1.771
F/F	17	4.93	8.03	3.10	1.746

This research was conducted under the direction of Dr. K. S. Sitaram, Department of Speech-Communication, University of Hawaii.