

Media Pedagogy - The Medium is the Message

Syed Sultan Ahmed

Abstract—The current education system in India is adept in equipping and assessing the scholastic development of children. However, there is an immediate need to strengthen co-scholastic areas like life-skills, values and attitudes to equip students to face real life challenges. Audio-visual technology and their respective media can make a significant contribution to a value based learning curriculum. Thus, co-scholastic skills need to be effectively nurtured by a medium that is entertaining and impactful. Films in general have a tremendous impact in our society. Films with a positive message make a formidable learning experience that can influence and inspire generations of learners. Leveraging on this powerful medium, EduMedia India Pvt. Ltd. has introduced School Cinema a well researched film-based learning module supported by a fun and exciting workbook, designed to introduce and reaffirm life-skills and values to children, thereby having a positive influence on their attitudes.

Keywords—Co-Scholastics, Entertaining, Educative, Holistic-Development

I. INTRODUCTION

THERE are many challenges that confront Indian adolescents in their day-to-day life, some of which are – A 14 year old feeling lost, lonely and mentally disturbed returning to a deserted house after school, who could he talk to? Another 14 year old feeling disturbed and uneasy when she finds her friends and classmates are sure about what they want to do when they grow up and being uncertain is just not acceptable, how can she deal with such expectations? Skipping meals the day she hears her friends calling her fat, is this cause of concern for a young 12 year old? Being ridiculed and teased for doing things the way he likes to do instead of following suite, should he be ashamed of the person he is? A 10 year old feeling guilty when he witnesses his parents fight, is he to blame? Feeling uncomfortable with the way someone looks and touches her, a concern of an 11 year old girl. Should she discuss this with her parents? Will they believe her?

These are some of the challenges that came into light when adolescents participated in a survey conducted by EduMedia India Pvt. Ltd. for the purpose of addressing student's personal and social apprehensions as part of school curriculum, aiding educators to move from the realm of being non-judgmental to being sensitive and rather accessible.

Adolescence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the age group of 10-19 years. In India, adolescents (10-19 years) constitute 21.4 percent of the population, comprising one fifth of the total population.

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Adolescents endure many psychosocial problems at one time or the other during their development. Many of these problems are transient in nature and are often unnoticed by family and the school. Further children may exhibit these problems in one setting and not in the other. Sailing through the several key transitional periods (from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school) can definitely present the adolescent with new challenges which when not gauged into, can result in feelings of helplessness and feelings of incompetency to deal with every-day life challenges.

In the past a lot of emphasis was laid on character education. But over the years this aspect of education was neglected, the focus being on competition. The fallouts are a diminishing value system and lack of skills to face everyday challenges. Today, its importance is well understood by all educators and they have taken up a number of initiatives to introduce character education classes in schools.

Educators in India have acknowledged that there are problems in preparing teachers effectively for the classroom and to inculcate values and skills. The challenge is to promote values, co scholastic skills and cultures that fit in with needs of the modern times. This gave us the scope of exploring a powerful medium of imbibing values as well as teaching children skills that will enhance their overall personality through a fun and entertaining medium - this medium being cinema and films.

The world we live in is clearly permeated with media. We teach our children to read and write. Yet we're really not cognizant of the language of media and its powerful effect. Though Management Schools and even Corporates now use films as learning modules, there is no similar content available for children. Stories paint a mental picture of characters, situations and moral dilemmas. Narrating them by visuals can elicit powerful emotions as it captures the child's interest and imagination. Creating cinema in context of values can help them become aware, understand and internalize their social responsibilities. Research indicates that combining storytelling with discussions enhances a student's ability to clarify and examine their own value systems.

The influence of media on children has long been the subject of increased attention among educators, parents and health care professionals in India. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), "Children are influenced by media—they learn by observing, imitating, and making behaviours their own" (2001, p.1224) [17].

Research has shown that 8 year olds catch three out of every five things that their parents see. They tend to remember 90 percent of what they see in the movie six weeks after they see

it, and three months later, they still remember the same amount. Research also talks about the relationship between movie watching and attitude formation. Findings show that the most important thing learned is the establishment of the fact that the attitude of children toward a social value can be measurably changed by just one exposure to a picture. Research also suggests that scenes of danger, conflict, or tragedy produce the greatest effect on children between ages 6 to 12 years as compared to adults who had the lowest score of effect because of their "consciousness of the unreality of the scenes, the quality of the acting, or their ability to forecast what is going to happen" [18].

The evidence that was found through research studies is clear that children do pick up a lot of information from the movies that they see and will remember the scenes for a long time. So, instead of accusing media and cinema to have a negative impact on children, can we use the same medium to drive home a positive message that will endure in the young minds? It's about time we change our perspective and the way our education system views learning.

How can schools therefore teach adolescents these skills? We believe that films would provide a convenient, economic, and impactful way of filling a serious educational gap.

Movies based on issues that children face, help reflect on their own condition. Hearing about life through the lens of movie, gives an opportunity to see their lives more clearly and in some cases differently.

The process of listening, visualizing, consuming and reflecting on their real life stories helps children clarify their own values and conditions. Thus, complex teaching like developing sensitivity to societal norms, expectations, acceptable attitudes and standards of behaviour can be made simpler by triggering the child's thought process by way of films.

It is important to make movies that a child can relate to, focusing on issues that cater to their age group in current and are prevalent in the current time. The traditional form of telling moral stories may not be impactful as the child may not be able to relate to the traditional characters and some children may not find it very realistic.

Having understood the impact a movie can have on child's life, it is sad that we do not have movies that help a child understand ways of life and trigger social sense and moral responsibility. Though India produces the highest number of movies annually almost 1000 feature films annually; there are very few films for children. The few that are being made are fun and entertaining but do not cater to psychosocial issues that children are facing today.

It is worth noting that children are better able to internalize the message that a movie has put across if there a learning mechanism that allows them to introspect and reflect on the movie. This can be achieved through the use of illustrations and workbooks. When young children are exposed to picture books, they are building important bridges to literacy. The illustrations and text work interdependently, the integration of

the visual and the verbal tell the story of the movie. The illustrations add a new dimension that extends beyond the words on the page; together, the text and pictures make the message of the movie stronger. A well crafted workbook is a feast for the eyes of a young child. The illustrations awaken and develop the child's visual, mental, and verbal imagination.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Well's (1986) seminal study investigating the links between story-telling and success found that the key to literacy development was consistent exposure to story-telling and narrative discourse in both the home and classroom environments. Current studies support Well's findings, suggesting that telling stories encourages the development of healthy self-concept (Paley, 1990). They have been found useful in the growth of imagination (Rosenblatt, 1976; Gallas, 1994), morality (Coles, 1989; Zipes, 1997) and self-identity (Chinen, 1996). In addition, Egan (1999) suggests that dramatic format of western story itself can function within classrooms as the primary form of teaching and learning [8].

Classic stories with memorable characters, clever plots, and universal themes help to lay the foundation for a lifetime of pleasurable and successful reading encounters (Lamme, 1987; Newman, 1985) [19].

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), "Children are influenced by media—they learn by observing, imitating, and making behaviours their own" (2001, p.1224) [17].

Audio Visual technology and their respective media can make a significant contribution to a literature based reading curriculum (Rickelman and Henk, in press) [19].

Both audio and visual media can heighten children's appreciation of literature and provide the cognitive framework for story comprehension (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Cohen, 1968; Well, 1986).

The amount of media usage in everyday life has repeatedly found Indian children adopting traditional values like respect, honesty as well as modern values like competitiveness (Chawla 2005; Gahlaut 2005)

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Rationale

The current survey helps to gain insight about the varying concerns that today's adolescents in school are familiar with and to understand the need for the school curriculum to surmount the same. The findings will help facilitate the perceived concerns or worries of adolescents that seem to be neglected through a medium which drives home the message; the ability to deal effectively with problems.

B. Objectives

1. Become aware of the current trends and the most pressing needs/concerns of adolescents today
2. Understand adolescents' values and attitudes towards self, family, school and society

- 3. Gain insight into the factors and people that act as a high influence on adolescents' decisions and behaviour
- 4. Understand recent trends and degree of media exposure amongst adolescents

C. Sample

- 1. Sample Size: 1000
- 2. Age: 10-14 years
- 3. Class: 5th - 8th standard
- 4. Gender: Girls and Boys
- 5. Sample City Size: 8 cities
- 6. Sample Technique: Purposive Sampling

D. Tools of Data Collection and Procedure

Keeping the objectives of the survey in mind and based on secondary research conducted to identify key areas in which adolescents face problems, a questionnaire was drafted aimed at understanding the profile of children under each age-group and focusing on issues faced at the personal, familial, school and societal level. The questions asked were quantitative and qualitative in nature. The survey was carried out in 8 cities across India namely - Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mysore, Madurai, Patna and Cuttack. The participants of the survey fall under the age group of 10-14 years of age, studying in private schools from classes 5 to 8. The total sample size for the survey was 1000 with an equal number of boys and girls. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Parameters were identified for the quantifiable data collected. Each parameter was quantified to a percentage thus used as a medium for comparison and arriving at findings. For the analysis of the qualitative questions certain themes were identified and the recurring responses under each theme were tabulated.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

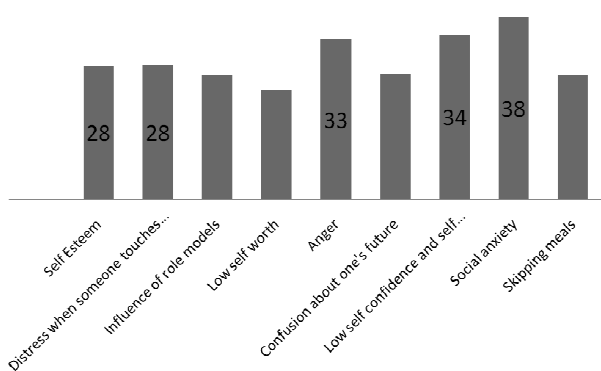


Fig. 1 represents the concerns or issues that adolescents have with themselves

As shown in Fig.1, 38% of the adolescents in the survey have social anxiety to the point that it acts as the most prevalent problem they face. 34% of the respondents exhibit very low self-confidence and self-belief. Another major difficulty adolescents' face quite often are outbursts of anger – 33%.

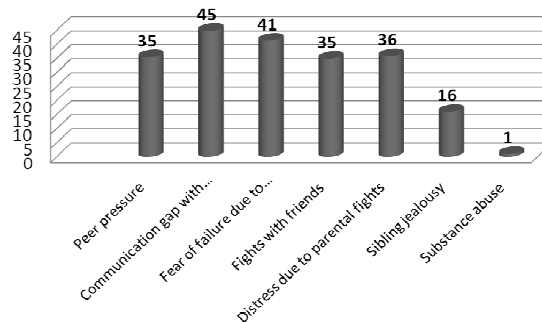


Fig. 2 represents the concerns and issues adolescents faced with family and friends

As shown in Fig.2, 45% of adolescents feel that the communication gap they have with their parents' acts as the biggest concern they face. Close to that, 41% of the respondents are terrified of failure because of high parental expectations which in turn leads to a lot of stress for them. 36% of adolescents also feel very distress when they witness their parents fight.

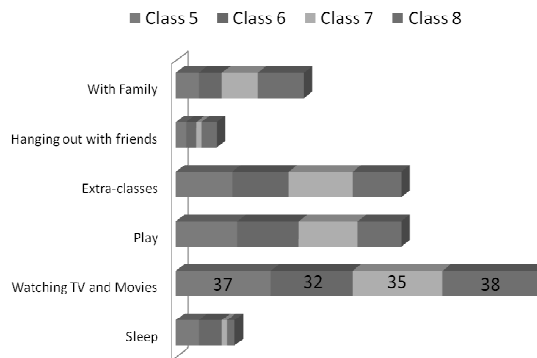


Fig. 3 represents the time students spent on activities after school hours

As shown in Fig.3, majority of the students in all the classes spent most of their time watching television and movies during their free time. Adolescents spent very little time sleeping and hanging out with friends after school hours.

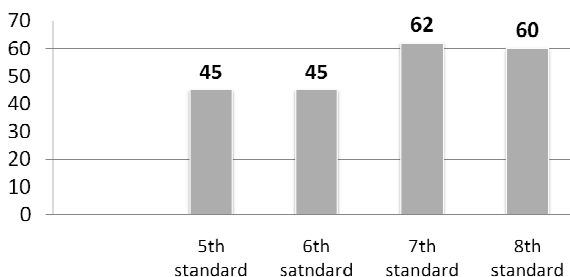


Fig. 4 represents the percentage of adolescents in each class who are members of social networking sites

As shown in Fig.4, on an average, more than half of the survey respondents use social networking websites for different purposes such as games, chatting, making new friends, sharing information, pictures, staying in touch with friends and surprisingly, also because of peer pressure.

Based on the results illustrated in Fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4, the need of the hour is having quality value-based content and increasing the scope of learning. Specifically, when it comes to instilling life skills and imparting values to empower adolescents to deal with concerns they face. Lack of trained manpower and over emphasis on academics are the primary reasons why schools find it difficult to equip children with skills to handle life issues, which could range from a simple understanding of the value of telling the truth, to dealing with far more serious issues like bullying or academic stress. Are we cognizant of the language of media and its powerful effect? Can we use this medium to drive home a positive message that will endure in the young minds?

In urging education to work with rather than against the positive potential of media, EduMedia India Pvt. Ltd has created - School Cinema - an innovative framework. The main features of School Cinema are: A film based learning module for children, teachers and parents to reaffirm values, morals and equip them with skills to deal with everyday life's challenges, an audio-visual medium as a message, uses research based content, acts as a good training aid to understand the psycho-social development of children, brings parents in the circle of learning through specially created films on parenting and increases self-confidence and enhances the personality of students

The process that is usually followed in developing a School Cinema module is explained below:

The first step in the process of developing School Cinema involves a secondary research on the internet and using books that is carried out to identify issues and understand children in a particular age group. This is followed by an in-depth nationwide survey carried out amongst students, teachers, parents of a particular age group and interviews with experts such as psychologists, counselors etc. to identify the concerns that children face. On arriving at the top issues/concerns, content dockets are made which contain complete information on the issue along with incidents that have been described by students. These are sent to prominent film makers who make the scripts based on the content docket. Once the scripts are finalized, the film is made.

The film is followed by the creation of a fun and exciting workbook that incorporates information, illustrations and activities that enhance learning in an entertaining and informative manner. The workbook looks at three levels of learning which is: Awareness, Understanding and Action.

Each of the three levels is explained below:

Level 1 – Awareness: The students relate to the film and identify the core issues addressed in the film

Level 2 – Understanding: The students understand the issue and relate it to their own lives

Level 3 – Action: The activities in every module enable the students to internalize and act out the key learning.

The workbook also has three levels of evaluation – self, peer and teacher. The School Cinema process is completed with a formative and summative CCE assessment (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation) that evaluates the students Life Skills - Thinking Skills, Emotional Skills, Social Skills; Values and Attitudes.

Below is a brief explanation on one of the most liked films for the 6th Standard: *My Daddy Strongest*

A. Issues Identified Through Research

A common issue that children in this age group face is with regard to honesty and being truthful. Children usually lie for a number of reasons at this age and they do not understand what a lie can do and the implications of this as they grow up.

B. Film Synopsis

Little Joel has a big problem. Why? Because he's told all his friends that his dad is a super secret agent! But now, he doesn't know what to do since there's a Parent-Teacher Meeting at school the next day and all his friends want to meet his spy Dad! Will he find a way out or will he tell the truth?

C. Key Objective of the Film

Understand the implications of lying and learning that an easy escape through lying is not the solution

D. Students Responses on the Film

"I like this movie very much as it was very interesting and I learnt that if our father is a shopkeeper, it does not matter as they love us very much. I love my parents and thank god for giving me such good parents. I liked Joel's acting and the music was good."

"I liked the movie very much. It tells us that we must not tell lies. We should not tell lies about our parent's profession because later when the truth has the chance to come out then we will feel bad. Moral: if we tell one lie, we may get to lie hundreds of lies."

"The film was nice and we learn that we should not tell lies. We also learned that we should not lie to our parents. We should always say the truth."

"I now know that many of my fears are my imaginations. I need not be scared"

V. TESTIMONIALS ON SCHOOL CINEMA

"I find the project interesting and very relevant. I wish you All the Best... I request you to send the copy of the Film; I would like to watch it" - Mr. Vineet Joshi – Chairman, Central Board of Secondary Education.

"We need innovative concepts in Education and this, sounds like a good step towards it... My best wishes for the project, I'm sure the children will love it" - Mr. Neil O' Brian - Chairman, Council for Indian School Certificate Examinations Board.

"School Cinema is awesome, it is mesmerizing and informative. It teaches us so much about actual life and it is a

great way to teach than those 'boring' classes where all we get to learn is some theories. The movies are just perfect because we unknowingly learn so much. The movie 'All Is Well' was related to the situation of almost every teen. Our classes are good but your movies have a great contribution in making them even better and of course interesting." - Pooja Mishra – Student, DPS, Patna.

"Being short does not matter at all... this is what I've learnt from the movie 'Dedh Footiya'. I'm short and really feel odd sometimes when I'm with my friends as they are all taller than me. I now realize that height isn't everything... It's changed my view" - Ritika Aggarwal - Student, D.G. Khetan, Mumbai.

"We run to the AV room for our School Cinema classes, I just can't wait to watch those lovely films... I guess that's the only fun and entertainment we have in class 8." - Pooja – Student, Gurukul, Haryana.

"Realizing that moral values are slowly diminishing in society, Delhi Public School hits upon the idea to teach such values in the form of a short film – School Cinema... It will be included in continuous comprehensive evaluation" - Times of India, July 2010.

"School Cinema is very nice and insightful. I feel the concept is very unique as it very entertaining and educative" - Manjula Ramam - Principal, Army Public School, Bangalore

"Schools are keeping up with technology and are investing heavily in things that impact a child's learning and understanding abilities. But, what may be missing is value-based quality content" - Maharukh Khodadwalla - Principal, City International School, Mumbai

"I would have never known that my student is sensitive and matured as I see him as a naughty and not so bright in studies. The School Cinema session has enabled me to understand him better. All that I need to do is motivate him better" - Regima, - Teacher, Daffodils English School, Bangalore.

"The students relate to the films as they face these issues... they feel their story is being portrayed... each student can relate to one or the other character. Since the endings are so beautiful it encourages them to deal with the challenges they face in a positive manner. They know it is not fiction but a reflection of their lives" - Priti Dave - Teacher, Center Point School, Nagpur.

"School Cinema will have a paradigm shift in the field of education. This new style of teaching develops the mind, body and spirit. It involves not only teachers but parents too which is very important and unfortunately is missing from our education system. The package is designed to help children to be sensitive, inculcate values and traditions and live in harmony. I am sure this will bring about some changes in the lives of many children" - Dinesh Das - Academic Coordinator, Delhi Public School, Vijaywada.

"The movie was very helpful as it made me realize the things I do every day impacts my child. I also understand that sometimes my behavior may not always be right and I should be conscious of what I'm doing" – Parent - Daffodils English School, Bangalore

"These movies are an excellent way of communicating what's in our minds to children... It makes them to think, especially the older children" – Parent - Sophia High School, Bangalore.

VI. CONCLUSION

Movies with the content of stories connecting to a student's life have an impact on their interpersonal relationships, empathy and interest. They have the power to stimulate sympathetic responses and cause them to think more deeply about the social world. They raise their consciousness and enrich their lives by engaging them in thinking critically and deeply about the social issues. Post movie discussions and interactive workbooks can help students internalize the message. Thus, it can be said that Cinema is a powerful medium to inculcate life skills and values in children as it helps children internalize these skills through a fun-filled and interactive manner. Audio-visual media can be a powerful entertainment and education tool for children given the right content is projected.

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