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A spring board to fly

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A spring board to fly **By Aafiyat Nazar**

Creative writing is an excellent way to broaden a student's imagination writes Aafiyat Nazar



WHY creative writing? It is generally accepted that when students have stimulating environments, they can perform better. Apart from the environment, one of the important aspects, which facilitate learning, is students' knowledge of the self. The more students will be aware of their potential the better they will perform. However, students may not be aware of their potentials until they get a chance to stretch their minds. Involving students in challenging task, be it curricular or co-curricular are the effective ways to do so. Creative writing is one of the effective ways to provide such an opportunity. It also results in improving students' confidence, thinking, writing and many other skills.

It has been observed that students have not been given opportunity to write without a book or any reference. The widespread rote learning system in the most of the public and some of the private schools in Pakistan can be taken as testimony. This situation is also prevalent in majority of school in the Northern Areas (Gilgit and Baltistan), Pakistan, be it government or private. It is evident from the students' confessions during my visit to their schools and interaction with them, that they have never written a story on their own. Their teachers too admit the same. This was revealed to me during my visits to more than 30 schools in the Northern Areas, Pakistan during the year 2006-7.

During the support visits to schools, I had to go to different classes (class 5 to 10) in different schools with the objective to help students to develop stories on their own. It was surprising to find that it was a new task for majority of students to make a story. I would ask them as "how many of you have created a story on your own? None of them is confident enough to raise his/her hand. I, then asked them whether or not they have ever created an oral story? There was complete silence again and again. Then I tried to elicit their strengths by encouraging them that "you might have made many stories". They were not sure that they had ever made stories. It was evident from the responses that talking about stories was a difficult task for them.

But when I posed questions about their response, as well as that of other people's response to a difficult situation created by a baby's demand, they came up with different responses. They talked a lot about different tactics to divert the baby from his/her demands. Some of the students replied that we tell them that a monster is coming; some said we tell a lie in order to comfort them and/or divert their attention, etc.

These responses were the basis where upon I facilitated them to embark upon the journey of story writing. Initially, I asked the students to name famous persons, animals, villages etc. The students came up with various names. Then, I chose one or two names from each group of names and wrote them on black board, then told them to develop links between these names to create a story on their own. I also asked them and wherever necessary told them: how to start a story. For example: Long ago there...Once upon a time... etc.

While students were writing stories, I had to go round from student to student in the class, encouraging them and giving them feedback individually. After 10 minutes of writing I would stop them and ask 5 or 6 students to read their stories to the whole class. I also asked the language teachers to be with me so that they could observe their students' creative thinking and writing skills, so that they are able to build on their creative skills. The students most of the time came up with very good and interesting stories and teachers agreed that they had never expected their students to produce such amusing stories. At the end of each story writing session, I would repeat the same question as I used to ask in the beginning as "how many of you can write a story of your own?" In response to that I would always see 100% students raising their hands.

As students started writing stories on their own, and delightfully sharing them with their colleagues, I observed the ecstatic emotions that were evident from their smiling faces. It also gives me ecstasy for facilitating them to embark on original first creation. I saw that even some of the teachers were smiling while students told their stories.

This might not appear smart or interesting enough to some teachers, but I believe this is one of the many effective ways to make the students think independently. I am confident if the teachers give such chance to their students, they will definitely see many positive.