

High School Students' Creative Writing Texts: Culture, Travel, Relationships, Life Incidents, and Asian Indian Epistemology

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Abstract

Gayathri Vidapeeth, Haridwar, India is an educational institution affiliated with *Dev Sanskrithi Vishwavidyalaya* (DSVV), Haridwar. In the summer of 2015, a delegation from the University of Texas at San Antonio (department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching) offered professional development to instructors and students at DSVV through an invitational summer institute. The institute was modeled after the San Antonio Writing Project, a site network of the National Writing Project. One of the co-directors of the Haridwar Writing Project collected narratives from high school students at *Gayathri Vidyapeeth* after teaching classes using the writing workshop model for a week. In this study, the director, co-director, and a Haridwar Writing Project teacher consultant collaborated to analyze the data collected at the school. Data was analyzed utilizing four different approaches to narrative writing – Bruner's ten features of narrative, Riessman's thematic, and Frawley's therapeutic and semantic scales analysis.

Keywords: Asian Indian students, narrative writing, themes, writing workshop

Introduction

The San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP) anchored in the department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching at the University of Texas at San Antonio is site network of National Writing Project. The SAWP instituted the Haridwar Writing Project (HWP) at Devsanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, India in the summer of 2105. The SAWP teacher consultants offered professional development summer institute to fifteen fellows

that were recruited by the pro-vice chancellor of the university. During our tenure in India, we visited the elementary, middle and high school affiliated with DSVV and taught classes for a week and collected narratives from high school students to explore the students' expression of culture and heritage (Caughey, 2006). We were interested in stories that were culturally framed, empirical in nature, and those that addressed the students' cultural wealth and funds of knowledge (Ityerah & zarzokini, 2011; Koenig-Kellas, 2013; Pufall-Jones & Mistry, 2006; &). This article examines the themes that emerged through four different approaches that pertain to sociology, psychology, and narrative writing.

Significance of the study

This qualitative narrative study may be beneficial to educators who are invested in children's funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth. When we examined the textbook used to teach high school at Gayathri Vidyapeeth, we discovered how all of the textbooks contained western canonical literary pieces. For example, William Blake's "Chimney Sweeper" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" were used to teach English language and literature. Students in India, especially from the rural areas may not have the prior knowledge of the vocabulary or the concepts discussed in these poems and short stories. Phrases such as "locked up in coffins of black" and "your chimneys I sweep" may not be familiar to these children. When we gave them an opportunity to write on culturally relevant topics, they were able to compose and later joyfully share with their peers. We assessed this expression of happiness during member checking.

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). This theory originated from Kark Max and was further strengthened by Engestrom (1999):

First, activity theory is deeply contextual and oriented at understanding historically specific local practices, their objects, mediating artifacts, and social organization (Cole & Engeström, 1993). Second, activity theory is based on a dialectical theory of knowledge and thinking, focused on the creative potential in human cognition (Davydov, 1988; and Ilyenkov, 1977). Third, activity theory is a developmental theory that seeks to explain and influence qualitative changes in human practices over time. (Engeström, 1999, p. 377-378).

The narratives analyzed here had a heavy presence of influences of CHAT and its impact on high school students' epistemology.

Literature Review

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is another theoretical lens to view the current research. It is a theory that developed from John Dewey's (1998) contribution to social sciences and psychology. According to Dewey (1998), experience is both individual and communal, and the community experience is derived from the constructivist paradigm, especially exogenic and endogenic experiences. Exogenic is world-centered and endogenic is mind-centered (Gergen, 2009). Narrative has the power to combine both the "cultural world-view and self in relation to personal experience" (Orellana & Sanchez, 2006, p. 211).

According to Fisher (1989), “Narrative Inquiry accepts the idea that knowledge can be held in stories that can be relayed, stored, and retrieved” (p. 59). Narrative inquiry follows the constructivist paradigm of how people learn about their world. Boix Mansilla (2000) argues, “As constructionist, the epistemological framework proposed posits that the purpose of inquiry (and learning) is the advancement of understanding (p.7). Hence, narrative inquiry is how students understand life through sociocultural experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further claim that:

Educators are interested in life. Life, to borrow John Dewey’s metaphor, is education. Educators are interested in learning and teaching and how it takes place; they are interested in the leading out of different lives, the values, attitudes, beliefs, social systems, institutions, and structures, and how they are all linked to learning and teaching (p.6).

Educational researchers are, first, educators, and we too are interested in people (p. xxii).

Therefore, educators can focus on teaching diverse students using the students’ lived experiences (Dworin, 2006).

Research Question

What do the narratives written by high school students in a rural school in India reveal about their culture, travel experiences, relationships, life incidents, and Indian epistemology?

Overview of the school

Gayatri Vidya Peeth School, affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) was established in 1982 and is affiliated with *Sri Ved Mata Gayatri* Trust and it located in *Shantikunj*, Haridwar, Uttarakhand. The Institutions work towards inculcating

cultural, moral, and intellectual decorum in students so they become contributing members of the Indian society. This is one of the best schools in Haridwar that offers education to students from all walks of life. The school is attached to *shantikunj* group of institutions. The school has a library and science laboratories attached to a computer laboratory. The school offers cricket and basketball, volleyball, table tennis, badminton and other sports. The admissions process begins in the month of May. The academic session commences in the month of July.

Shantikunj

Spreading the ethical and spiritual awakening along with the unique knowledge of national unity, peace and brotherhood, Shantikunj is a place for spiritual awakening. Shantikunj, founded by Pandit Sri Ram Sharma Acharya, a freedom fighter, saint, and philosopher has become a place for seekers of divine knowledge. The All World *Gayatri Pariwar* with seventy million followers all over the world is working towards teaching people about humanitarianism. *Shantikunj* offers camps and training courses regularly including spiritual development course, *Yug Shilpi* advance training course, music workshops, etc. Besides these, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidhyalaya offers a range of professional courses for youth empowerment. Shantikunj is also popular for conducting the *Vedic vivah* (wedding in the Vedic format). One of the reasons why these institutions are successful is because of the willingness of the staff to serve the cause by volunteering their expertise and time in the institutions attached to Shanti Kunj.

Research Design

Context and background for the study

The study took place in a school that had students from lower kindergarden (LKG) to 12th form (grade) and is located in a village in Uttarakand, which is in northern India. The building accommodates 2000 students each year. Most of the students are Hindus and come from various socio-economic backgrounds. The students are day scholars and are transported on school buses from different parts of the town. The school also educates girls from a nearby orphanage called *Matranchal*. Most of the teachers and paraprofessional staff are volunteers and they live in a nearby university campus.

Methodology

Description of study participants and setting

All of the 100 participants of this study are dual language speakers. Hindi is their mother tongue and the medium of instruction is Hindi and English at school. The writers were from 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. The participants were both girls and boys ranging from 14 to 16 years of age.

The classrooms were spacious with desks aligned parallel to each other facing the blackboard (see figure 1 below). The students were seated at all times and there was no technology in classrooms. Teachers do extensive board work and students take copious notes in classes.

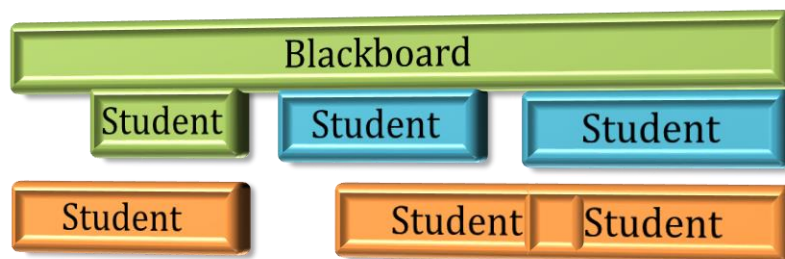


Figure 1: Classroom Layout

Data Sources

The data source for this qualitative study was narratives written by high school students. Data was collected after the co-director taught classes on narrative writing using the writing workshop model and a mentor text for one week. The students generated drafts in the classroom; peer reviewed the stories, and then edited the stories at home before they submitted the same to the principal investigator. One of the English teachers from the school audited the classes during the writing workshop and she also translated the instructions to Hindi for those students who may have had difficulties understanding the researcher's instructions.

Data Collection

The co-director of the Haridwar Writing Project approached the principal of the school and submitted the request for teaching classes for a week. Before that request was made, the co-director also applied for an institutional review board (IRB) approval at the pro-vice chancellor's office (also the chairman of the school). The students were asked to write narratives on topics of their choice and no specific length was required. The writers had fifty minutes to write before they could engage in the peer review process. The participants were given an opportunity to present their stories and several students shared their texts.

Validity was established using Loh's (2013) peer and audience validation, where two co-researchers helped guard any biases because the PI was an insider to the topics

dealt within the study. The instrument used to collect data was carefully written by all of the researchers in this study. Writer's workshop with the independence the participants have in composing their narratives is an established method to collect narrative data.

The following table illustrates the data collection timeline (see table 1 below).

Table 1: *Participants' Assignments and Data Collection*

Participants	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3, 4, and 5	Day 6
9 th Form	Narrative Writing & Mentor Text	Writing Workshop Open topic	Peer review & Sharing	Submission
10 th Form	Narrative Writing & Mentor Text	Writing Workshop Open topic	Peer review & Sharing	Submission
11 th Form	Narrative Writing & Mentor Text	Writing Workshop Open topic	Peer review & sharing	Submission
12 th Form	Narrative Writing & Mentor Text	Writing Workshop Open topic	Peer review & sharing	Submission

Data was collected through the writing workshop (WW) model. The principal investigator conducted the WW in four different grades at the school. The following section is a description of the model.

The PI followed the *Share First Strategy* for writer's workshop as described by Peha (2010). *Share First* includes sharing, mini-lesson, status, and writing time activities. The PI asked the participants to share their topics after they brainstormed for a few minutes on the first day. Then, the PI asked if students needed help with the topics and offered a mini lesson on their topic choice. After that the PI asked them to rethink, and list a few topics that they were interested in. Then, the participants shared the topics again, and chose one to write on. The next day, the participants wrote for 45 to 60 minutes uninterrupted when we started class. Finally, they shared their narratives to the entire group three times taking turns. The PI offered mini-lessons depending on the participants' needs at the end of each workshop. The participants engaged in thinking, writing, sharing, and editing consistently and periodically for one week. The following section describes the daily activities.

Day 1

- a. The PI discussed the purpose of narrative writing and the writing workshop including the mini-lessons for participants who needed help with specific topics.
- b. The participants brainstormed for topics and listed a few to be shared to the entire group. If anyone needed a mini-lesson on topic choice, the PI did so in small group conference session or one-on-one conference. If there were more than two participants needing mini-lesson, the PI followed the small group conference format.
- c. The participants wrote for 45 to 60 minutes on the second day, and then shared their writing willingly each day. No one was forced to share.

- d. The participants took their writing pieces home to edit and add more information. They were instructed participants not to seek help from their parents or siblings at home.
- e. **Day 2**
 - a. We began the next four days with sharing; the participants who wanted to share their updated narratives did. The PI asked if the participants needed help with editing or adding information, and offered a mini-lesson on those or any other topics depending on the participants' requests. Some asked the PI to share her own personal narrative and she did. The PI also wrote a narrative along with the students because that is the San Antonio Writing Project strategy for students to experience their teachers also writes and share along with them.
 - b. The participants engaged in sustained silent writing for 45 minutes each day after the first day. The participants wrote on the same topic that they brainstormed and chose the first day although they were allowed to write on a different topic.
 - c. The PI held individual conferences with each participant to find out if there were issues that need to be addressed. She then offered mini-lessons in those areas. The participants shared their writing before leaving each day.

Day 3

- a. The participants shared their updated text when class began.
- b. The asked if anyone needed help with any aspect and offered a mini-lesson on that topic.

- c. Then, the participants wrote for another 45 minutes uninterrupted. They continued to write on the same topic from day 2 to day 5.
- d. The PI then, looked for commonalities in terms of topics and then grouped the participants to find out if they needed help. She offered a mini-lesson in a group session.
- e. The PI also talked to the others who had written on different topics and asked if they needed any help. She then offered mini-lessons using one-on-one conference format.
- f. Everyone went back to polishing their narratives minutes before they shared their finished product to the entire group on the last day.
- g. The writer's workshop culminated with sharing what the participants had written. Since this was the last session, we shared to the entire group.
- h. The participants took the stories home to edit and add information, but they were asked to hand over the same to their English teacher the next day.

The PI collected all of the writing samples for analyses after five days. Second, a questionnaire was provided for the participants so they indicated their choices and provided pertinent explanation that affirmed what they wrote through their narratives. Third, the researcher conducted informal conversations with the participants about the narratives. The researcher kept field notes about the process, product, and outcomes. The same questions were used for both written and oral responses. After analyses, the researcher member checked with the participants. The PI spoke to 20 participants from different grade levels.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed utilizing the following four different approaches. The four different analytical methods were applied to the narratives because of the applicability of the methods in the process of extracting rich themes. The approaches were (1) Bruner's ten features of narrative (2) thematic analysis that emerged while reading and rereading the stories (3) Frawley's semantic scales analysis- the students ability to overcome obstacles through their stories, and finally (4) Frawley's therapeutic narrative analysis. These metaphors were culturally contextualized to the Asian Indian experiences that prompted us to apply Frawley's semantic scales analysis. In the process of data saturation, we applied all of the four approaches to all of the narratives - Bruner's (2008) ten features of narratives, thematic analysis (Riessman, 2001), three features of therapeutic narratives (Frawley, Murray, & Smith, 2003), and semantic scales analysis (Frawley, Murray, & Smith, 2003).

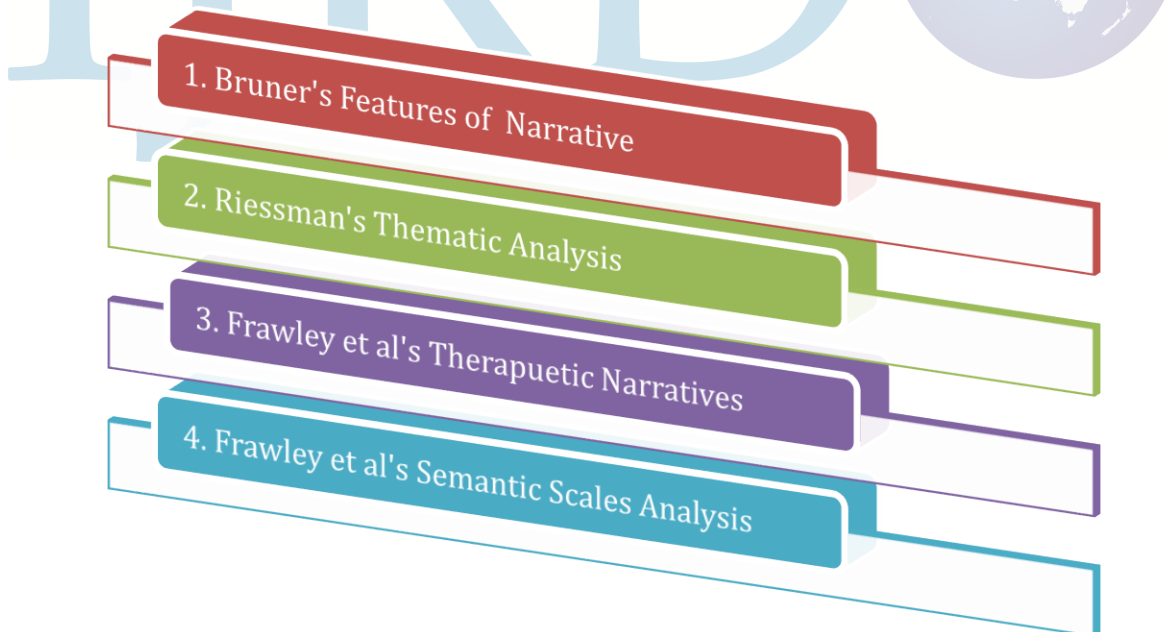


Figure 2: Data Analysis

Bruner's Narrative Features

First, data was analyzed using Bruner's (1991) ten features of narrative. According to Wertz, et al (2011), "Within psychology, Jerome Bruner (1990) has championed the legitimization of what he calls "narrative modes of knowing," which privileges the particulars of lived experiences" (p. 225). Bruner's ten features of narrative are as follows. The features are narrative diachronicity, intentional state entailment, hermeneutic composibility, canonicity and breach, referentiality, genericness, normativeness, context sensitivity and negotiability, and narrative accrual. Narrative diachronicity is the shift between psychological and chronological times over a period of time. Bruner calls this shift a mental model. It is also is the record of events in a narrative over a period of time against at a point of time (synchronicity). Particularity refers to the interpretation of stories depending on prior knowledge based on the kind of the narrative.

Intentional state entailment is how stories are about people in a particular social milieu and how people represent their "beliefs, desires, theories, and values..."(p. 7) through their stories. It refers to the characters' perception and interpretation based on the characters' view. Hermeneutic composability deals with the aspect of holistic content analysis to make sense of the content of the story. Hermeneutic composibility is the interpretation of narrative based on the plot points that make up a story. Canonicity and breach deals with the peculiarity in stories that are not typical. It is the normal and the change that contravene the normal due to life experiences

Referentiality relates to the power to represent human suffering, joy, and other significant events. It also deals with the interpretation of such events. Genericness is the classification of narratives in terms of genre. Normativeness, dictates the events in a story. This feature follows canonicity and breach. Content sensitivity and negotiability

deals with the collaboration between the writer or text, and reader. Finally, narrative accrual believes that stories are collective and there is connection between new and old stories.

Referentiality is the reference to real life events in stories, not always directly, but could be referred to. Genericness is the opposite of particularity; genericness refers to the particular genre. Normativeness is the prescriptive aspect, where by telling through the narrative of how one must act. Context sensitivity and negotiability is the understanding between the text and the reader and the interpretation. Finally, narrative accrual refers to the collective nature of narrative; how older stories provide stimulation for new ones.

Figure three lists Bruner's ten features of narrative (see figure 3 below).

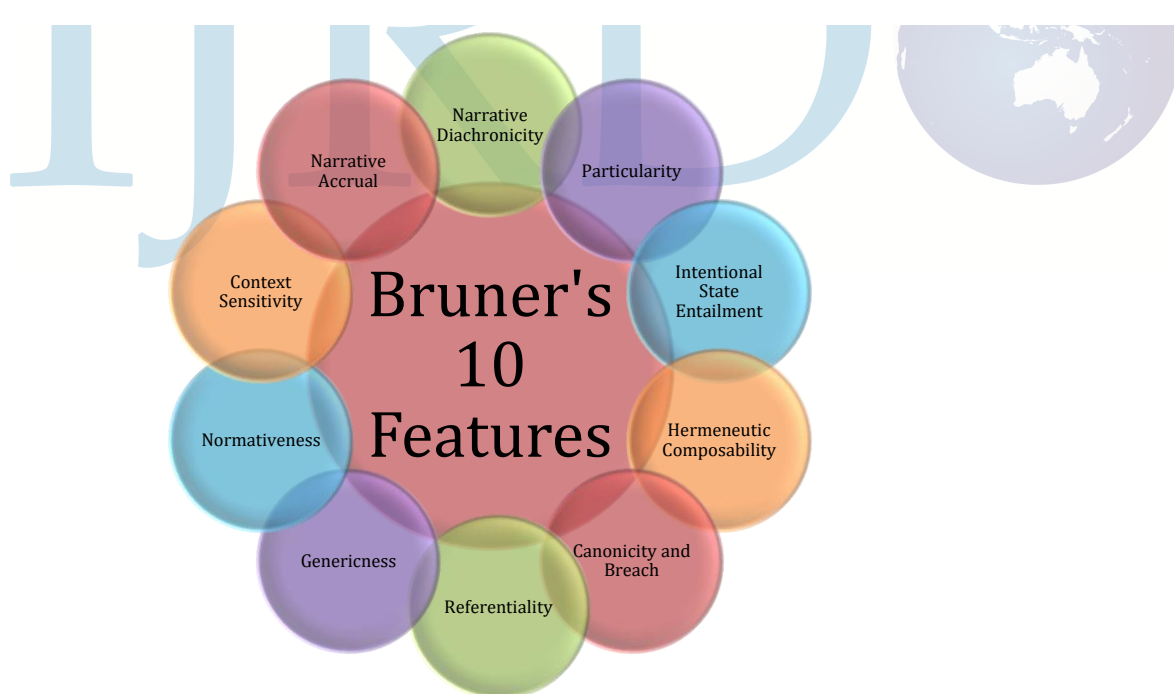


Figure 3: Bruner's Features of Narrative

Narrative Diachronicity – Participant 56 describes her sense of fulfillment after her visit to the Chandrabadni in Uttarakand. That is where the family diety, Bhagawati

resides. Recollecting the journey, the participant says, *I was excited to visit that place at last because it was the auspicious festival Navarathri time for us...The Ganga river float [sic] in very distance from the road. It looked so beautiful and just like the heaven...Now I was in my home and gave the Prasad as blessing of Maa Bhagawati to all...* The writer feels content when she thinks of his visit to the mysterious place after she returned home.

Particularity – One must have prior knowledge of the history of Ganga to recreate the events as done by participant 78. He admires the river and narrates; *Ganga is sacred which originates from Gaumukh (cow's mouth) at Gangothri in the holy Himalayas.* This writer's descriptive language stems from his background knowledge surrounding river Ganga.

Intentional state entailment – The illustration of Asian Indian values are illustrated in this narrative by participant 90. He writes; *By the study of these holy books & [sic] scriptures we can infer the specialties of Indian culture as follows – welfare of others, speaking the truth, Respect for our teachers to work without the desire for its remuneration (sic), ahimsa... Because of these things I [am] proud to be an Indian.* The epistemological understanding of life as inferred in this writer's text was also found in () other writers.

Hermeneutic Compossibility – About thirty-five participants wrote about their relationships with other people and animals such as parents, grandparents, cousins, friends, teachers, and pets. In order to understand the interpretations of the texts, we must read the entire narrative. For example, writers 15, 35,76, and 98 wrote about their mothers, *...hence I love my mother (15).* This participant has done an inductive account of why she loves her mother and that can be fully understood only if the readers know the

entire story. Participant 35 wrote, *After that day, my granny came (sic) daily in my dream. It is sad to believe that really my grand maa [sic] is no more.*

Here, the young adult is trying to come to terms with death of his grandmother and the reason why he is attached to his grandmother can be fully understood only by reading the entire story. Writer 76 shares her attachment to her friend, *The girl is still my friend and will always will be. I thank god for giving such a friend to me.* The detailed description of how they met and how they bonded etc. is provided in the story. Participant 98's relationship with his dog is captured in his story. He narrated; *My bond with my pet was broke [sic]. God snatch (sic) a very precious thing from me. He took the life of my pet from me.* If we read the story in its entirety, we will follow the attachment and the disappointment later on.

Canonicity and Breach – The normativity is broken in one story written by a 12th form writer when he names his dog 'facebook'. Facebook is not culturally relevant to Asian Indian students because it was coined in America in the 21st century and it is the name for a social media site, where people connect using multimodal texts. Another writer narrates the struggles of street animals in India by imagining herself as a street dog. However, it is important to note that in India, cows and other animals roam around the streets and it is a common sight.

Referentiality – Many participants capture the descriptions of life and suffering in India. One example is writer 43's story about how a day went wrong in this boy's life. He starts off saying, *Life is a mixture of joy and sorrow...I saw my grandpa standing like a statue with tears in his eyes...my father came into the house very emotional...my grand ma dies that day.*

Genericness – All of the texts were written in narrative format except for one journalistic text. The participant reports, *Today newspapers play a very important role in our life. They have become as important as food and clothes...Sometimes they publish false news and spread rumors. Sometimes rich men use them for their personal gains. The advertisements are obscene at times. The news of rape, dacoity [sic], abortion and the poisonous minds* (45). This report captures the intent and messages newspapers deliver to the public.

Normativeness – Many writers explain the assumed code of conduct in the context of the participants' milieu. Participant 5 recalls what is Indian culture in her narrative, *The culture in India is everything such as inherited ideas, way of people's living, beliefs, rituals, values, habits, care, gentleness, knowledge, etc.... We can see culture in everything like dance, artistry, music, behavior, social norms, fashion, food, architecture, dressing sense.* This writer appreciates about the values that her culture teaches her.

Context Sensitivity and Negotiability – Many of the narratives can be interpreted using our own lens and experiences. The writers who wrote about festivals explained how they worshipped different deities depending on their family philosophy. Participant 16 wrote about Deepavali, the festival of lights and described the worship of Goddess Laxmi, the goddess of knowledge and wealth, *My mom said that first do worship of goddess Laxmi....* Another writer praises Lord Vishnu, who protected Prahalada, *We worship the Narasimha avatar of Lord Vishn, who protected Prahalada from Holika.* These episodes reveal the beliefs of children raised in the Hindu tradition and people from outside the religion and culture can misconstrue these descriptions.

Narrative Accrual – Children build on stories that they hear when they are young. Participant 2 wrote about his visit to Haridwar, a holy city in North India. He recollects stories that he had heard about the place and the impact of Ganga water on people, *When I first went to Gangaji for a snan [bath], I felt sacred...I wondered about the myths about haridwar.* Another example where the young adult experienced amazement in Mathura, another holy city in North India, *Firstly we go to Vrindavan...Then we go to Prem Mandir. It was too beautiful to see the nature and animals...When it was time to go back, I whispered to my cousin, “I don’t want to go back...”*

Thematic Analysis

Next, a thematic analysis was conducted because many writers expressed their appreciation to different leitmotifs in their stories. The four different topics that emerged from the data analysis were – culture, travel, relationships, life incidents, and miscellaneous topics (see table 1 for themes). First, we categorized the topics applying Risseman’s (2001) thematic analysis. According to Riessman (2001):

Thematic analysis can be applied to stories that develop in interview conversations and group meetings, and those found in written documents. Several exemplars illustrate how stories can have effects beyond their meanings for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging, and collective action” (p. 64).

Through applying thematic analysis to the narratives we collected in India, we could identify five themes (see table 1 for topics and themes).

Table 1: Topics and Themes

Culture	Travel	Relationships	Life Incidents	Miscellaneous
Languages	Delhi	Grandparents	Birthday	Cricket
Festivals	Mathura	Parents	Marriage	Patriotism
Lohori	Mussoorie	Friends		Superstitions
Diwali	Calcutta	Teachers		
Holi	Haridwar	Pets		
Makara	(River Ganga			
Shankranthi or	Shantikunj			
Utaraan	Bilkeshwar)			
Dance	Nainital			
	Chandrabadni			
	South India			

Clustering the topics in the narratives enabled us to identify five different themes.

The following figure is an example of how one of the themes, *culture* was formed by

combining the different topics such as languages, festivals, and dance in the narratives (see figure four below).

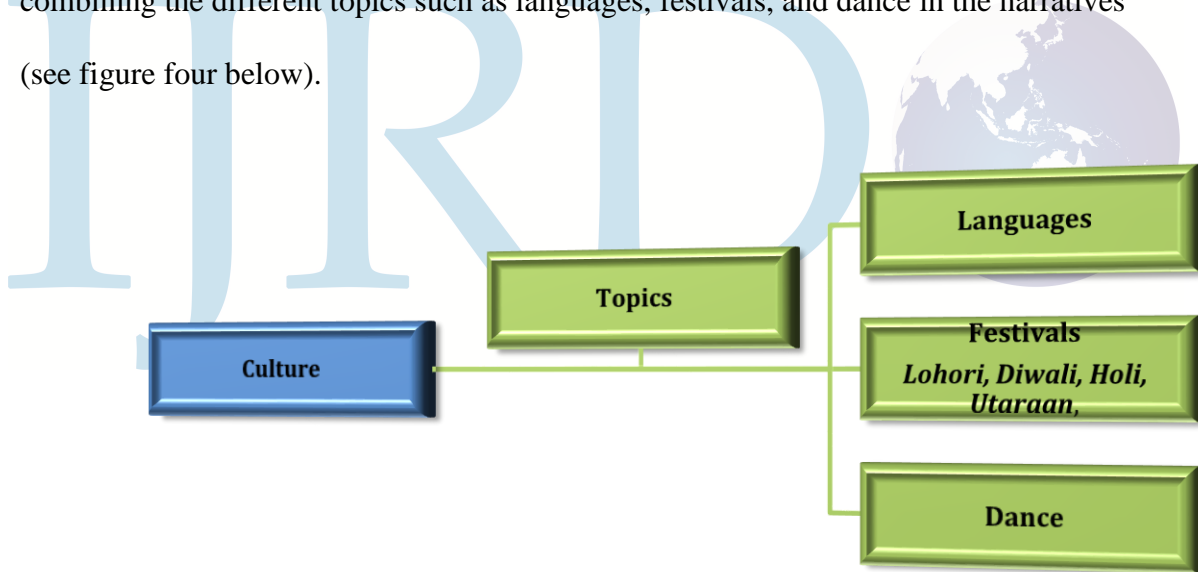


Figure 4: Theme Culture

Topics

The themes were extracted through the different topics that the children conveyed in their narratives. The participants wrote about topics ranging from languages, festivals,

dance, travel to different historical and religious places, birthdays, death, wedding, cricket, and superstitions. We categorized the topics to form the following themes:

1. Culture – Languages, Festivals (Lohori, Diwali, Holi, and Makara Shankranthi/Utaraan)

The theme culture was obtained after clustering the topics languages and festivals.

Next, the theme travel was formed after combining the topics including visits to different places of interest.

2. Travel - Delhi , Mathura, Mussoorie, Calcutta, Nainital, Chandrabadni, Haridwar (River Ganga, Shantikunj Bilkeshwar), and South India

Later, the theme, relationships was coined after combining topics such as grandparents, parents, friends, and pets.

3. Relationships – Grandparents, Parents, Friends, Teachers, and Pets
Then, birthdays and weddings were clustered to form life incidents.

4. Life Incidents – Birthday and Marriage

Finally, three topics including cricket, patriotism, and superstitions were clustered to form the miscellaneous category.

5. Miscellaneous - Cricket, Patriotism, and Superstitions

Semantic Scales Analysis

Since the topics of students' narratives also dealt with psychological influences, we applied Frawley et al's (2003) three features of therapeutic narrative: (1) semantic networks, (2) metaphor, and (3) semantic scales. A semantic network is the connection established between the statements in the narratives. For example, participant ten

describes her grandmother's death by recollecting the day the writer heard the news and how it impacted her and her family members.

...Wake up your grandma is no more". I can't believe these lines because I don't want to lose granny...I saw grandpa and his eyes was full of tears. My brother is trying to talk to granny, but she is still quiet...Suddenly, my sister woke up and asked, "What's happening?" My mother replied, "We lost granny". After that she fell down. I don't know what's happening to us..."Ma, get up, I am your son". All started to weep...The time came when I grandma went for "Dah sanskar" [Hindu cremation]...My mom is unable to stop her tears, in fact we all cried a lot. I miss my grandma so much...

The writer's recreation of family members' emotional state after a death in the family is a 'therapeutic exchange'. The following figure (adopted from Herman (2003) is an example of therapeutic exchange in narratives (see figure 5 below).

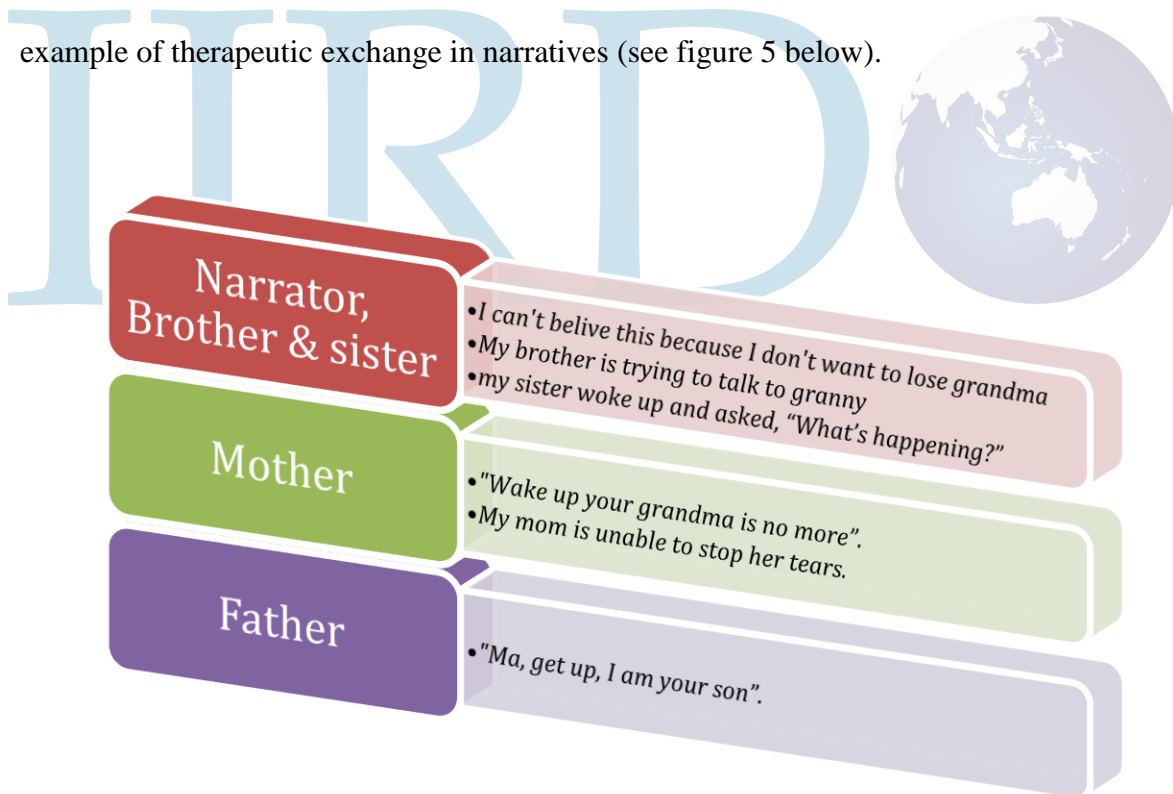


Figure 5: Therapeutic Exchange

Next, we applied the metaphor analysis, which according to Frawley et al (2003) is, "one instrument by which plausibility is established and sustained in the narrative" (p.

104). Although, the narrator and the other family members are in denial about the grandmother's death due to the initial shock when they found out the first time, the metaphor used in the excerpt illustrates that they realized the loss eventually.

The metaphor for death is *Dah Sanskar*, which is the Sanskrit phrase for cremation and the obsequies that follows when a Hindu dies (*The time came when I grandma went for 'Dah sanskar'*).

Finally, we conducted the semantic scales analysis to a few selected narratives that were dense with vocabulary. Given the sociological influences in the narratives, we applied the semantic scales analysis. According to Frawley et al (2003), semantic analysis enables researchers to discover three aspects of narratives – (1) co-construction, (2) plausibility, and (3) reflexivity. Co-construction is the different interpretations extracted by the characters in a narrative. Plausibility is neither “the referential depiction of past events nor the development of hypothetical solutions, but something in-between-something like functional plausibility” (p. 88). Reflexivity is the expression of other people's thoughts and our perceptions of those thoughts in narrative.

Co-construction – Children appropriate concepts that they learn in their communities and home. Participant 56 wrote about superstitions and said, *It wasn't more than two years when Swarna came worried to Neha's place and shut the door like something bad was going to happen. Neha was surprised to see Swarna in this way. Neha asked her, "Nothing much, but a black cat crossed my path!" It wasn't a big deal for Neha. Swarna further told that it is not a good sign, something bad happens when the cat crosses someone's way... Neha realized that Suvarna was superstitious.* The speaker is

sharing to rationalize the incidents and the listener is co-constructing knowledge based on the interpretation.

Plausibility – Even though Neha did not believe in superstitions in the beginning, after experiencing a near-to-death incident, *Neha began to realize Swarna's belief in superstitions, ...A car coming in speed which was to struck her just stopped in front of her and she was afraid that she couldn't think anything. She was very upset with what had happened and she started thinking about everything that she did day. She recalled it and all something banged her mind, a cat had crossed her way nearby.* According to Frawley et al (2003), “Insight itself refers to those retellings that make a beneficial difference in a person's construction and reconstruction of experience and adaptively active conduct of life” (p. 89).

Reflexivity – Conversations between Neha and Swarna were beneficial to both in the end although in the beginning, Neha did not believe in what Swarna was proposing about superstitions. Neha had to rely on a self-directed action to begin to realize Neha's point about believing in superstitions, *...So all-in-all she too somewhat started believing in those superstitions. She even thanked Swarna for giving her the light in dense darkness. The irony is that the person who didn't believe in something like superstitions, started believing in it...* This realization came after the interaction between two friends. Frawley et al (2003) posit that “The semantic strategies of the participants, we hope to show, reveal how they are seeking to re-narrate their past lives in order to narrate their future” (p. 90).

Validity

The participants were asked to read the analyses and provide their reflections of the same. Member checking revealed both the etic and emic perspectives used in data analysis of the narratives collected. According to Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel (1999),

Etic and emic can also refer specifically to codes, such as those used in Thematic Analysis to label sections of text according the themes and patterns. An etic code is one developed from the literature or prior research, while an emic code arises from the data and is often built from a participant's own words (p. 1).

The researchers made sure to keep the participants' interpretations in mind when analyzing the data.

Findings

The question posed for this study was - what do the narratives written by high school students in a rural school in India reveal about their culture, travel experiences, relationships, life incidents, and Indian epistemology?

The narratives written by high school students in India enabled the researchers to gauge the depth of first hand experiences about the children's culture. That aspect was expressed through their descriptions of languages they spoke, dances they performed and watched, the different festivals they celebrated at their homes (e.g. *Navarathri* and *Deepavali*) and with the community (e.g. *Holi* and *Uttaraan*), and the travel that helped them internalize their cultural experiences. The writers expressed their belonging and connectedness to their culture (*I am happy to be part of this rich Indian culture, 46*).

The writers described their travel experiences to different cultural, religious, and historical places of interest (E.g. River Ganga in Haridwar, Delhi, Rameshwaram). These visits were positive and made them aware of the regional differences that existed in India.

Another finding focused on the participants' relationships with family and friends. Children were attached to their grandparents and some lamented the death of these elderly members of their family. Others wrote about how their family members were instrumental in their emotional growth (*Shweta Kandwal is my mother. She is a very good mother...She is very smart and intelligent. She is a very good cook. I admire my mother*).

The writers expressed their joy in attending weddings and how they regretted losing their loved ones. Most of the narratives revealed aspects of the children's epistemologies that stemmed from their heritage, culture, experiences, and communities they belonged to. These young adults gained knowledge through their interactions with their family members, through traveling to places of interest, and engaging in community events.

Conclusion

Through this exploration, we have tried to highlight the importance of tapping into children's creative writing. If given an opportunity to write stories based on children's culture, experiences, relationships, and epistemologies, they will express themselves freely and construct stories that are culturally contextualized to their experiences (Yosso, 2005). Children will also use vocabulary that is framed to ameliorate their experiences giving the readers an authentic interpretation of cultural experiences. Children not only learn to appreciate and acknowledge their lived experiences, but also

acquire linguistic and cultural tools. The language domains are necessary for success across the curriculum and cultural education is a requirement for psychological well being and connectivity to learning outside of home. In addition, most of these children come from homes where other heritage languages are spoken and not English. So, learning English using unfamiliar and disconnected texts may pose a threat to learning. Allowing students to write about their lived experiences may encourage authenticity of expression and may help them with vocabulary building, oral and writing skills enhancement.

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