Research Papers

Exploration of Life Skills through Researcher Generated Cartoons

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Abstract

Visual methods are a marginalised area in the field of research methods in education. The use of cartoons within this field is even more negligible. The use of photo elicitation and audio-visual techniques often takes precedence over techniques such as cartoons. As compared to interactive audio-visual software and animation, the use of 2D images is a challenge for researchers working among primary school children. This paper deals with the possibility of using cartoons as a tool to understand the life skills of preadolescents. It discusses methodological issues that arise while using visual methods in dealing with sensitive issues, especially with such young respondents.

This paper also discusses how researcher-generated cartoons were created and the problems encountered in administering, seeking permission from authorities and ethical issues related to the use of cartoons. It highlights the usefulness of such methods in educational research, when carried out taking the cultural values and beliefs of the setting into consideration.

Key words: *Cartoons; Visual methods in education; Life skills*

Visual Methods in Research with Children

When we write or picture the social world we reformulate it.

— Knowles and Sweetman

Researching children's experiences is challenging, particularly so in primary schools when the research question deals with personal problems of the child. To begin with, the mainstream schooling

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process in India is so obsessed with academic achievement that it could be daunting to explain to teachers and school administrators the very purpose of a research of such nature that does not study academic accomplishment. There is a good chance that they might dismiss any study that does not deal with academic achievement as unnecessary. However, for a researcher interested in the child as a person, it is of great importance to understand the lived experiences of children and how children interpret and negotiate their daily life. This would require the use of methods that can capture the nature of children's lives as lived rather than those that rely on taking children out of their everyday lives into a professional's office or 'lab'(Greene and Hill, 2005, pg. 4). This study attempts to understand the concept of lifeskills through primary school children's experiences. An investigation of this nature necessitates an understanding how a child thinks and feels in a crisis in daily life. Since the nature of the problem is sensitive and deals with domains outside school life, it requires methods beyond naturalistic observation to elicit responses. Hence visual methods were selected for this study. According to researchers (Allen, 2009; Pink, 2001) who use visual methods for young people — Visual methods prioritise the voices of the young and hence have the potential to challenge existing approaches by giving young people the opportunity to narrate their stories in their own voice. In this aspect visual methods stand in contrast to adult—designed methods like interviews which rely exclusively on written text. The pilot studies undertaken in this study to explore children's experiences revealed to the researcher that many school children found questionnaires and interviews uncomfortable, which confirmed what the aforementioned researches suggested and in turn led to the selection of visual methods to explore the experiences of the child.

This paper critically examines the effectiveness of cartoons as a visual method in eliciting responses from children regarding their life experiences and in turn so as to enable a researcher to study their life skills. In doing so, it attempts to answer the following questions: What is image based research and how effective are cartoons as a visual method? How do cartoons get generated and how are they used to elicit responses from children? Though the research topic of this study is life skills of young children this paper focuses solely on the methods adopted to understand this concept and hence the method of creating cartoons will be discussed prominently in this paper.

Cartoons – A Visual Method for Children

Image based research includes found, researcher-generated or participant-produced video, photographs, drawings, cartoons, maps and other visual forms of expression and representation. Over the years, the use of images has been accepted as a valid method of data gathering, and is simultaneously considered as a part of alternative approaches to representing research results, because it offers a different form through which researchers and participants can express their experiences and present themselves to others (Chaplin, 2004; Prosser, 1998; Rose, 2001).

While discussing interviews using images and texts vis-à-vis interviews using texts alone, Harper emphasises the fact that images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness, which is perhaps a strong reason for the increasing use of photo elicitation techniques in sociological and anthropological research.

Within the domain of image research, the use of photography has been debated with regard to subjectivity and unscientificity almost from the very beginning of the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Becker, 2004). Some researchers believed that photographs could not capture the essence of a routine (Goffman, 1979). This very notion was challenged by researchers like Chaplin who used photo diaries to authenticate the use of photographs to capture the reality of routine life. Chaplin notes that very soon she felt that the photographs by themselves were incomplete and required short descriptions. Quoting Burgin (1986) she states, "Photographs do not speak for themselves, and at a basic contextual level it is words which give meaning to images" (qtd. in Chaplin 36). The realisation that knowledge of the cultural context was necessary to adequately interpret pictures has made it almost imperative that visual images are accompanied by explanatory statements.

In this context this paper explores the potential of cartoons as a visual method within the discipline of education. Appealing to both children and adults alike, cartoons are a medium that uses visual and textual material to reformulate the social world. Harper (2002) further states, "Most elicitation studies use photographs, but there is no reason studies cannot be done with paintings, cartoons, public displays such as graffiti or advertising billboards or virtually any visual image"(Harper,1) highlighting the significance of cartoons as a tool in eliciting responses. For various reasons though, perhaps due to the difficulty in designing, producing or collecting cartoons, they have remained neglected in educational, sociological and anthropological research.

As compared to photo elicitation techniques, where one uses a device to capture an image, researches with cartoons as a tool seem difficult because cartoons pertaining to the topic of study are not easy to collect from magazines and newspapers. Moreover, generating cartoons requires producing an image using creativity and skill—drawing skills as well as skills to build narratives – alongside a thorough understanding of concepts and contexts.

The next concern – similar to the debates over researcher-generated and subject-generated photographs – is researcher-generated versus participant-produced cartoons. The image and text that arise out of the interaction between the researcher and the participant are received by the participants very differently when compared to those that the researcher alone presents. The context recognition by the participant in the case of the former enhances the potential of cartoons manifold in the field of education, especially when the research questions are difficult to be extracted and understood in terms of words alone. However, we need to distinguish between the use of researcher-generated cartoons and that of child generated artifacts and drawings or photographs. The following can be used as markers for the same.

1. The control rests in the hands of the researcher. A cartoon cannot be interpreted effectively without dialogues and great care needs to be taken not to appropriate the child's narrative by using adult language. An incident from the child's life translated by the researcher into a cartoon has elements expressed by the researcher from his or her understanding of the event narrated by the child. The researcher must always be aware of the thin barrier that might differentiate his or her perception of the event from that of the child.
2. Articulating a child's narrative in the form of a drawing by an adult requires a great amount of imagination, empathy and understanding. The onus in this process is on the researcher. It often entails the researcher constantly questioning his/her perceptions of what is trivial and significant in a particular scene in a cartoon. What attracts the child and an adult in the same cartoon could be widely different. There are situations where the child responds to the picture while completely ignoring the dialogues, which the researcher as an adult might find hard to accept.

Despite the differences between researcher-generated cartoons and those produced by participants, its legitimacy as a method in

research cannot be denied. The advent of 'concept cartoons' in the late 90's elucidates the acceptance that researcher-generated cartoons have received in the field of education. This approach advocated the use of cartoons so children would understand concepts in science and math, breaking the monotonous chalk and talk method to explain concepts. The possibility of presenting concepts in a poster format with pictures and dialogues for better understanding was the main thrust of this idea. Concept cartoons were viewed as one of the possible strategies for promoting argumentation (Feasey, 1998; Keogh and Naylor, 1999; Naylor, Downing and Keogh, 2001; Osborne, Erduran and Simon, 2004; Wellington and Osborne, 2001). They have since been used widely in science and math education and are believed to be an effective tool to supplement teaching methods.

Nevertheless, researches engaging with cartoons have limited themselves to improving learning and teaching. This paper attempts to illustrate the use of this tool to explore the life skills children employ in their day to day life while facing challenges in their personal and social setting. The paper thus draws attention to the possibility of using cartoons to study qualitative aspects of education.

The Study

This paper is part of an ethnographic study in four classes (two sections of 4th and 5th STD) in a primary school in the city of Chennai, catering to poor students. The school- KMHS was an unaided school and had children from three slums surrounding the school. The participants aged 8 and 9 years. The study had three objectives:

i. To explore and understand the issues and problems pre-adolescents face in their day-to-day personal, social, and academic life.

ii. To understand how life skills evolve through the challenges pre-adolescents face and the strategies they employ in their day-to-day life to cope with these challenges.

iii. To understand the factors that contributes to the enhancement of life skills development in personal, social, and academic life of pre-adolescents and to analyse the interplay between these components.

Cartoons as a visual method explored the first and second objective of this study and explored the problems of pre-adolescents (children below the age of 13).

Methodology and Setting

The research methodology of this study was informed by the ecological approach of Bronfrenbrenner and naturalistic observations. By adopting this approach, the researcher acknowledges firstly that children are embedded within social and cultural contexts and that the relationship between child and context is transactional; secondly, a great deal can be learnt about children's lives by following and observing them within these contexts (Tudge and Hogan, 2005)

This study sought to understand the daily experiences of the child using naturalistic observations. But from interactions with children during preliminary phases of the study it was soon understood that their life experiences stretched beyond school and it was not possible to observe them at their homes due to difficulty in gaining access to homes. Children came from backgrounds which were volatile with disruptive families and some single parent households. The issues of alcoholism and domestic violence were rampant in most families. Though it was difficult to observe the impact of these problems upon the children, it was evident from the conversations with them that these incidents influenced their lives greatly. The community they came from was sensitive and not easy to enter. Mostly parents worked from early morning to late evening making it difficult for the researcher to meet them.

As a result, through classroom observation and observations inside school provided an understanding of how children coped with, negotiated and interpreted daily experiences within school, focused group discussion were carried out using cartoons to understand specific problems that cannot be gauged through observation, especially those problems pertaining to family.

The study also draws strength from the social constructivist theory and argues firmly for the child's ability to construct meaningful interpretations of his world, which the researcher accepts unconditionally. Hence, the cartoons were drawn on themes that recurred in general conversations and were later taken up for discussion. This made up for the observations that could not take place outside schools.

The focus in the initial days was to observe the day-to-day activities of children and to understand the problems they faced in their domestic and social life and in turn to understand the strategies employed by them to cope with the same . This led to the exploration of life skills in children in day to day stressful situations. The following definition of life skills, given by WHO, was adopted for this study.

Life skills have been defined by WHO (1993) as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (pg. 2). The ten core life skills proposed by WHO are problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, communication skills, self awareness, empathy, coping with stress and coping with emotions.

In many situations in life, one or more of these skills need to be exercised to meet the daily challenges of life. Manuals and programmes focusing on life skills deal with specific issues that need to be dealt with for healthy personality development. Programmes seldom focus on understanding the inherent life skills in children. Moreover, there are hardly any modules that guide one in understanding how the child works in the context of a problem and how he/she acquires life skills.

Studying a research problem of this nature requires a holistic understanding of the context and life of the child and problems that he/she faces in day to day life. This would also require faith in the child's ability to deal with issues he feels are genuinely detrimental to his life. Therefore, taking a social constructivist stance and believing firmly in the child's ability to identify issues pertinent to his/her life, exploring the strategies he needs to employ in those situations became the objective of this study.

This question was too vast and hence observations were carried out for one month in the suburban school and two months in an urban school. The observations were recorded and children from disturbed backgrounds were observed more closely than others to form case studies. It soon came to the notice of the researcher that the children with problems at home had a different style of coping with issues personal to them unlike the others in the group.

The propelling question of the research was to understand how life skills were acquired and how the child viewed these problems and the solutions to them. It was soon understood that not all problems led to a tendency towards high risk behavior. Many children found problems in life quite motivating and many had developed resilience as a result of these problems. This phenomenon has already been discussed in other studies. But the journey of the researcher to reach this understanding was strenuous as it was difficult to conduct conversations of personal nature without knowing which children faced problems at home. The difficulty of an outsider to penetrate into long hours of silence was the biggest obstacle in this phase

of the study. Due to this situation, snowball sampling was done. When one child who confided confidently struck a rapport with the researcher, similar children were met through her and the informal discussions continued. Observations and interactions with children soon helped the researcher cull out a few problems that revolved around the three spheres of their life - family, school and peers. The cartoons that were generated were a result of such interactions.

On Cartoons — from Generation to Reception

The cartoons were used as stimuli to initiate conversations in the focused group discussion on issues pertinent to the lives of children. The respondents were limited to 5 in each focused group discussion (FGD). Ten such FGD's were conducted. As some members of the groups expressed discomfort in sharing their views with respondents from opposite gender, the groups had members from the same gender. In some groups there were issues with power and control. Many top academic achievers who were used to giving right answers in classes went silent when they realised the questions asked could be answered by anyone, even a 'mediocre' child. This broke their sense of superiority and in many groups the top academic achievers are not very vocal. Despite all these barriers, the study engaged in conversations with children to understand the issues pertinent to their lives that showed how they employed life skills.

Children responded to 16 cartoons (insert table) in the focused group discussion. Naturalistic observation was the main tool of the study and the cartoons were meant to provide supplementary information beyond the scope of observation. In some ways, this method is an adaptation of photo elicitation method by Harper (2002). The need to open up real life situations that focus on sensitive issues, which cannot be captured using a camera, led to the researcher drawing these scenes in the form of cartoons. Great care was taken to ensure that these images were neutral and not value laden as their role was just to initiate conversations and not lead to biased arguments.

The ideal situation would have been if children themselves could draw cartoons and discuss the problems in their life. Many studies have expressed the efficacy of such an approach (Cox, 1999) wherein with facilitation from the researcher the children were able to draw graphics and write metaphorically the messages for the graphics. But as Cox describes in her study:

> To be effective, telling cartoon stories involves a great deal of abstraction and editing. Some of the tales had several versions, drawn and written, and they still failed to complete all the cohesive gaps for the reader. None of the children found the graphics too demanding, but creating an unambiguous narrative line was not easy. That exercise encourages more flexible thinking and cooperative working so that, provided all the youngsters participate, it is one way to stimulate an exchange of ideas and proper shifts of focus (Cox, 231).

These were points that resulted in the researcher stepping in to create cartoons. Firstly, the participants selected for focused group discussions on random sampling had children of different acumen and many did not enjoy drawing. Even when they did draw figures, they struggled with writing dialogues and with basic reading and writing skills.

Secondly, many children did not get along well in a group to carryout an activity which required a high level of metacognitive thinking and analysis.

Owing to the limited time available between classes to conduct focused group discussions, it was found justifiable that the researcher undertook the task of producing cartoons with care given to construct them out of narrated incidents from the lives of the children.

The cartoons were drawn using the tools from a website that helped in designing cartoons[1]. The sketches were designed to bear resemblance with the people from the school community. Six figures were created who were later sketched in different backgrounds. These figures had definite names but each situation was introduced as an individual one and not as a series. The table below explains the scenes of the cartoons and the skills the cartoons aimed to understand.

Focused Group Discussions with Cartoons

A typical group discussion began with self-introduction of children. Sometimes in these introductions children brought up topics about family, school and the ensuing discussion helped strike a rapport within the group. The cartoons were introduced thereafter but in no particular order. These cartoons led to discussions on the issues portrayed in them and how the children faced the day-to-day situations depicted in the cartoons. At the same time, these sessions provided remarkable insight in terms of the efficacy of cartoons as

a tool in order to understand the day to day problems that children face and the strategies they employ to cope with the same.

Few points that came up were related to the commonality of characters throughout the cartoons, peculiarity of props in scenes, dresses worn by characters, resemblance of features to children at school. These points are further explained below with images as well as excerpts from the discussions.

It was often noticed that children were able to link the characters in different scenes and weave a story combining the sixteen cartoons under discussion. The cartoons had six characters in common but each scene was different and unrelated. However, the characters were given the same names for convenience and very soon this led the children to believe these cartoons were stories of Mala and Raghu who, like them, faced difficult situations in life. A few comments that are quoted below revealed how children were engrossed in the process of reading the cartoons.

> Gautam: Poor girl already her father has left her mother and her and she has enough problems and now these men are torturing her on the street.
>
> Balaji: Life is like that at times, bad things keep happening to the same person.

The above conversation took place after the discussions on two cartoons (one depicts Mala being asked to stay with her grandmother due to financial crisis and the other is a situation where Mala has to choose between her mother and her father who has remarried). While the use of the name and character Mala repeatedly was unintentional, the background, other family members were all different in both scenes. Yet children empathised so well with Mala that they did not care much about the other characters, nature of problem or even the fact that the fathers in both the cartoon were different individuals. This was interesting also because many children in the group had parents who had remarried and spent considerable time in two households. They hence neglected the characters depicted in the background like father, mother or siblings these terms were plural in their life as many said they had two fathers. What struck to them was only the central character


This is my family
i can't manage the expenses send her to your mother
But there are no good schools like she went here
Your brothers go to english medium does not mean you should go there too.
But why am I left here with patti and why should I go to govt school?
Madam, Please dont send Mala with her father
Why what happened?
He left us and married someone else now he is in a police case too !
I cant deny another parent the right to meet his child
What will you do if appa comes. Who do you want to go to?
Mala! I have come to take you home
What will I do?

who like them was a silent victim. Both cartoons were designed as individual episodes but children linked them.

The children often took the cartoons from the researcher and glanced at them/studied them before they began the discussion. Many children often segregated the cartoons based on the characters. The familiarity with the characters made them really empathise and answer more reflectively.

Augustine: Hey the same girl again

Satish: Her father must have brought a new headache

Ganesh: Is this a storybook, see the same girl here, here and here (taking out previous cards) and the same father here and here (pointing at the two cards), you should have made this a book.

Here again the children were trying to make sense of the cards by trying to establish connections between them rather than read each card as an individual situation. This slowly turned into a pattern and the researcher continued with the same to make it more comfortable for the group, as it was understood that children, like adults need a narrative thread to make sense of their daily life.

In this cartoon when the child uses statements like "same girl again" and "father must have brought a new head ache", they are trying to establish a connection between the cartoon discussed earlier where the father had left the daughter and mother to remarry. The present card dealt with the issue of the girl being asked to live with her grandmother leaving her own family due to financial crisis at home. Though the father portrayed in both these cartoons was depicted differently by the researcher, the children had already labeled the face of that character as an evil man. Hence, the very sight of this father figure implied 'head ache' and the girl was helpless. Perhaps, this was the subconscious giving voice to itself about how helpless children felt in crises created by adults in their life, to cope with which they constantly sought strategies.

The role of objects in the background of the cartoons, which seemed unimportant while designing, led to discussions that were more relevant than those engendered by dialogues.

While discussing the cartoon on the father who comes home drunk—

Venkatesh: That green bottle is a quarter bottle?

Vikram: How do you know?

Venkatesh: My grandfather drinks and makes me buy them so he tells me so that I can buy the right ones.

Shyam: You are great.

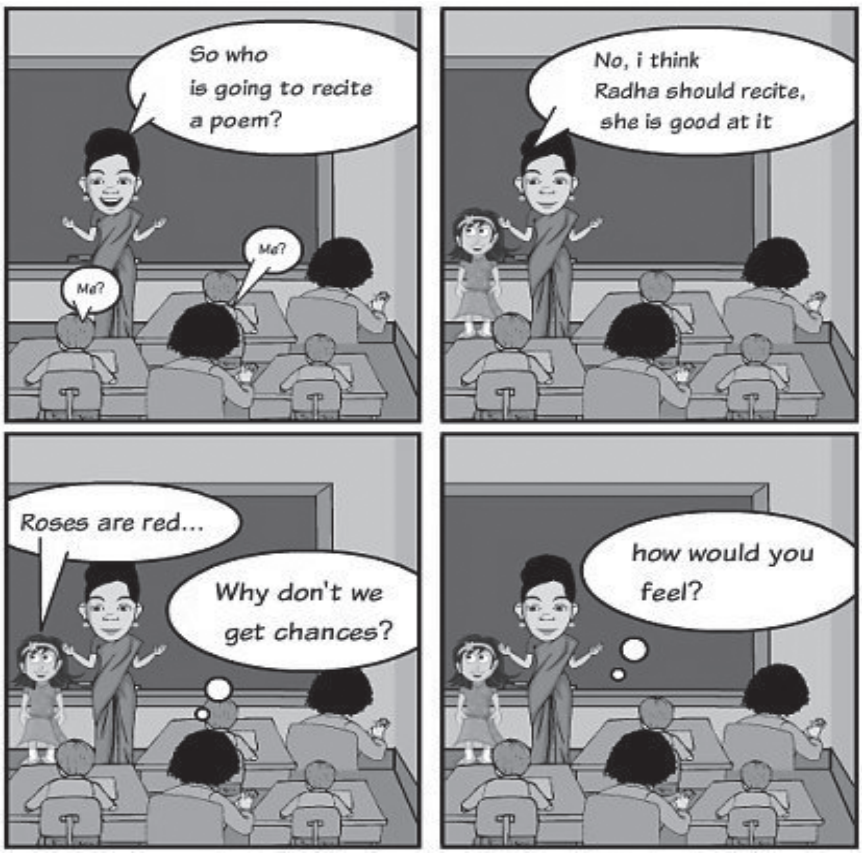
Venkatesh: I sell them later. The empty ones get you a good price.

The discussion thereafter turned towards the issue of alcoholism as intended, but the conversation was triggered because of the two green bottles depicted in the cartoon rather than the verbal clues or even human images. While designing the cartoon the researcher had no idea that the background would bring forth such spontaneous responses from the children. This further confirms the efficacy of visual stimuli.

It was interesting to come across a few faces in the school that resembled the cartoon characters, though the researcher had never met them before sketching. This too evoked a lot of interest among participants. The children who resembled the cartoons were considered heroes. There was amusement over how the researcher managed to sketch them without ever meeting them, which

established the researcher's as a person with skills. The need to keep in mind the cultural context of the study is further reinforced by this.

In another cartoon the researcher drew a girl with shoes, socks and a frock. Though the depiction was unintentional, the groups constantly queried as to why this girl looked so different from the other characters. There were a few children at the school wearing shoes and socks but these children were considered elite and unfriendly and so the negative feelings of envy towards the character in the cartoon were also understandable.



Data Analysis

The FGD's were recorded using a voice recorder. These recordings were then transcribed and translated verbatim from Tamil to English. Using Weft QDA software for analysing qualitative data

the transcripts were then coded. The codes later emerged into patterns and revealed the strategies children engaged in to cope with problems. The responses given by the children showed 22 possible strategies, which were categorised as active, passive, and neutral. Active strategies for instance meant immediate action and involvement in action while passive strategy meant action planned for future and involvement on action. In neutral strategies the problem is solved through involvement of thought and action. The strategies evolved are given below:

Active	Passive	Neutral
Dealing with anger	Lie	Wit
Advice	Hope	Philosophising struggle
Direct Confrontation	Avoidance	Belief in Faith/Luck charms
Assertive	Apologising	Economic rationale
Threatening	Other's do, We don't	Dramatic strategy
Ethical Stand	Resolving by rationalising	
Benevolence	Empathy	
Negotiation		
Scientific explanations		
Work hard		

With the help of three excerpts from the analysis, the strategies will now be explained. Sometimes the same response has been categorised under two strategies. There were also multiple responses and different strategies that expressed for the same situation.

Dealing with Anger (Active strategy): From the child's perspective, anger as a response is often found, in situations where their status of a child has been taken advantage of or they have been unable to make a crucial decision about a problem they were involved in. It has also been reported as an immediate response more or less a reflexive action that happens in the immediate context of the pertinent problem. The episode below narrates how a student copes with the problem through anger. This response was evoked by a cartoon that discussed the issue of domestic violence at home.

Naresh: My father creates similar issues daily but I come to school

Int: So how do you cope in such situations?

Naresh: Would beat my father for messing up our life.

Int: But beating father?

Naresh: He comes home drunk fights and hits our mother so we have to do something right?

See if father beats us with swelling here and there we might not miss school? If he spares us yet hits our mother we won't be able to go to school. So may be we need help. I would call my aunt and ask her to come over when there are fights. Or I need to deal with it so I will hit him back.

Usually children use parents as social reference for safety and trust. Parents form the major support systems to whom children look up to for reference or assistance when they encounter a crisis. But when they are puzzled about what is right and what is wrong in how parents behave or react in certain situations they are compelled to devise a strategy to cope with the existing situation. Their response as shown above oscillates between retaliation and anger. The same schema of problem and solution gets transferred to an external situation where the child is involved and powerless.

Avoidance (Passive strategy): Children used avoidance as a strategy to get by when faced with embarrassing or humiliating situations. Sometimes this happens in a situation where one is frightened or in some other situation where one denies acknowledging such issues at all. Avoidance as strategy is often used in the context of family in contrast to sharing when it comes to the peer group.

Augustine: Any issue if discussed at home creates tension between parents, so if we can avoid such discussions it's better for the family.

Children act out the expected roles prescribed for them by the society, by their family. Augustine in this discussion describes why he would not prefer discussing any of his problems at home. From prior experience children realize the impact of any discussion they have at home. Also the embarrassment or pain of having started a fight at home is strong and fresh in the unconscious mind of the child. It creates another reason why he chooses avoidance as a strategy over sharing information with the family.

Belief in Luck/Charms (Neutral strategy): In many instances during the interviews the words faith and luck came up. These were instances where children realised their actions would not help them get by or cope so a higher power or luck needs to be resorted to.

> Subash: I will ask my father why he drinks daily and suggest he wear the 'mala' so that he will change his ways.

Wearing of the mala (beaded chain) during the annual pilgrimage to Sabarimala is culturally an acceptable practice among many believers. One who wears the mala abstains from alcohol, non-vegetarian food and is supposed to stay calm and pious. Subash has seen his father following this ritualistically year after year and so he believes it could be a strategy that would help him cope with his father's alcoholism and related fights at home. Few other children too suggested this as a solution to coping with their father's fights and alcohol, substance abuse.

Twenty two such strategies with a total of 66 episodes were recorded from the FGD's all of which cannot be explained in this paper. The above-mentioned episodes are only three among these 66 episodes. But this paper demonstrates the process of creating cartoons and using them to elicit responses from young children in this case to understand their coping strategies which in turn denotes the Lifeskills exhibited by children when they go through crisis in daily life.

Summary of Findings

This paper attempts to illustrate the possibility of using cartoons as a potential method to elicit responses from children. The focus of this paper has been to share the fieldwork process of employing these methods in primary schools in India that cater mainly to lower income groups. While the stimuli here were researcher generated and hence could have limited the autonomy of children, basing the cartoons on a month long pilot study has proven to be effective in direct interviews. Also, employing audio-visual methods in the schools studied in this research was not economically feasible and, when attempted, created more diversions than fruitful discussions. Therefore, to understand issues sensitive and personal to the children, cartoons seemed to fare better than an oral interview with audio-visual aids. In the process of elucidating points on methodological and ethical issues in using cartoons as a tool in primary schools, this paper has also tried to link the origin of

cartoons to photography and photo elicitation methods. A deeper understanding of cartoons as a visual method in education research requires an in-depth understanding of the concepts and contexts of the study, which, in turn, facilitate the production of images and texts that can elicit meaningful responses and interactions.

The insights from the groups in which the cartoons were discussed also reveal how culturally relevant themes, faces and props matter while designing cartoons as children place great importance on these minute details. This paper has highlighted how this process was possible and is worth exploring in future researches. This method, though successful with many groups, was unsuccessful with some children. Some refused to answer questions and just enjoyed reading the cartoons making it difficult for the researcher to elicit responses. It was also noted that many who withdrew from participating in the discussion found non-academic activities boring or confusing. There were concerns among children that they would not be graded for this activity. This dulled the motivation to perform as in classrooms they were used to being reinforced for giving an answer. The fact that 'mediocre' children could participate and give answers made the top academic achievers in those groups uncomfortable. However, for 'mediocre' children who were constantly plagued by the fear of producing the wrong answer, to be part of a group where such fears were absent seemed motivating enough and they participated whole-heartedly. However, all this has more to do with peer relationships rather than the failure of the method of cartoons. In fact, an activity of this nature brought out these differences among children which in turn became topics that the groups could explore and discuss further.

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