



Going Beyond the Textbook (Part I)

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4.0 Objectives

After going through this module, you will be able to:

- understand your role, beyond using only textbooks, for teaching-learning;
- identify appropriate and meaningful resources as per the context and their availability;
- select and use the resources according to the needs of the children;
- help children connect the school learning with their surroundings; and
- be a reflective teacher who is sensitive to the issues of the environment and who can enthuse children with the same values.

4.1 Introduction

Just go back in time and recall the textbooks that you read in your school days. Could you recall stories, poems, definitions and formulas given in textbooks and realise the impact they made on your life? Each one of us has gone through the process of schooling where life revolves only around textbooks. Textbooks are used extensively for teaching-learning and often are rote memorized by students to pass examinations. School education in India is dominated by textbooks, which is considered as a legitimate source of knowledge and most often as the only resource available in the classroom. The question that arises is why go beyond the textbook and why not just stick to it.

Let us also try to look at the textbook from the children's perspective. Some children may like textbooks whereas others may not relate to it for various reasons. A child with learning difficulties may not understand the language of the textbook, another may find certain concepts and their presentation alien while some others may not be able to relate the text with their lives at all. All these can hamper learning and lead to problems that a child may not be able to express. Further, the child may face humiliation and rebuke, forcing them to move out of the system. A child may not relate to school or textbooks for numerous reasons. As a teacher, how will you address this issue and help such children? Is it important to just finish the syllabus by teaching the textbook or to help the children learn and progress? Obviously, your answer is that the main aim is to enable all children to learn for which the textbook could be one of the resources. However, teaching-learning cannot be textbook-centric but essentially needs to be child-centric.

Let us be clear that going beyond the textbook is not shunning them and doing something radically different. Rather, it means not limiting the student's knowledge to the textbook alone but expanding the horizons of his/her understanding and imagination beyond the written text. It requires involving children in experiences that are real and to help them be confident to question the issues relevant to their lives and acquire abilities to resolve them.

Limiting teaching-learning to reading of the textbooks and answering the questions given in the exercises to pass the examination, narrows the wider aim of education, which is to nurture the potential of each child to the fullest and not stifle him/her to the confines of the textbooks. It can only be accomplished if children experience joy of learning through education which unfortunately, at present has become a stressful and burdensome activity as they have to rote memorise the information from textbooks.

As per NCF 2005, “Learning has become a source of ‘burden and stress’ on children and their parents which obviously distorts the educational aims and quality.”

Could you recall the five guiding principles proposed by the NCF 2005 for curriculum development? These are:

- Connecting knowledge to real life;
- ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods;
- enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks;
- making examinations more flexible and integrating them with classroom life; and
- nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

A careful look at the above will help you understand that all the five principles are essentially connected and point at moving beyond textbooks. It is important for the teachers to realise that going beyond textbooks requires them to play a key role in bridging the gap between the child’s world and the textbook.

Let us now look at why there is need to go beyond textbooks especially in EVS.

4.2 Need to Go Beyond Textbooks in EVS

EVS, as repeatedly emphasised throughout the module, is an integrated understanding of science, social science and environmental education. You are also familiar with its objective and the social constructivist approach of teaching and learning in EVS that considers the child to be an active learner, who has innate curiosity and capacity to learn. The ‘social constructivism’ approach, influenced by the work of Vygotsky and Bruner, also suggests that adult support is crucial to children’s thinking. Through an appropriate question or suggestion, the child’s understanding can be extended far beyond the point which she could have reached alone. Another thing that is important to consider is that EVS learning has to be grounded in the needs and experiences of the children. A single EVS textbook is thus insufficient and cannot do justice to the curriculum. One has to bring in varied experiences into the classroom to make the curriculum relevant and suitable as per the needs of the learners. The teacher has to familiarize the children with the outside world and help them connect, question, challenge, make appropriate decisions and solve problems collectively.

You may find it difficult to cater to the needs of all students with distinct learning styles and varied learning abilities. A common teaching strategy, let alone a common textbook for all students, would obviously not work in such a situation; this will require one to go beyond the textbook. It demands teachers to adopt pedagogical choices that suit the needs and capabilities of the diverse student community. The teachers need to be innovative and resourceful to adapt or create learning situations suitable to the children’s needs and contexts. Above all, the teacher should be a reflective practitioner who understands how to bridge the gap between preaching and practice.

4.2.1 Textbook and Possibilities

Let us look at how a teacher is central to choosing resources and how it can impact learning. Look at the following excerpt from a class III EVS textbook.



❖ What all can you see in the picture?

❖ Which vehicles can you see in the picture?

❖ What are these vehicles usually used for?

With the help of this picture, a discussion can be initiated on situations which require emergency services.

the discussion and noted the details about what they were able to observe in the picture.

Case 3 Anshu got additional resource, i.e. a newspaper report on calamity in the state and discussed its causes and how the same could be avoided. The discussion was followed by putting up a chart paper in the classroom, which displayed important information to handle emergencies, e.g. contact numbers of an ambulance, hospital, fire station and that of the nearest police station. A student pointed out that there should be a minimal first aid kit in the classroom too, which they proactively procured. While the discussion was going on, she observed the students for:

- Participation in discussion.
- The details observed in the picture and recorded.
- The diverse reasons suggested for the cause of calamity.
- The ways in which a calamity can be avoided.
- Seeking information for help during emergency.
- Taking responsibility for assembling a first aid kit.

The picture is a resource for the teacher to help students observe it carefully and participate in the discussion. Let us see how three teachers carried out this activity in their respective classrooms.

Case 1 Kritima wrote the answers as per her perspective on the board with minimum discussion. She asked students to copy the answers in their notebooks. Later, she checked copies for completion of work.

Case 2 Another teacher Pooja involved students in the discussion and made them share their experiences. Later she asked them to write the answers in their own words. She observed the participation of students in

Let us reflect

- * What differences did you notice in the three different ways of transacting the same topic?

You might have observed the difference in efforts that the three teachers made to teach the same concept. This definitely affects the extent of involvement of students, their interest and the quality of learning. Most often, our teaching-learning is similar to that of Kritima which depicts a predominantly teacher-centric class with few opportunities for children to share their experiences. The children are passive and they just follow instructions given by the teacher. Pooja goes a little further in taking initiative and involves children by providing opportunity to write their experiences.

Anshu goes much beyond the text and engages children meaningfully through different activities. Children in her class get ample opportunities to explore, explain, elaborate and expand their experiences and relate the given task with real lives. This helps develop a holistic understanding as envisaged.

You might appreciate that there are immense possibilities to deal with the same concepts given in a textbook. It is thus up to us, teachers, to think beyond the box, and make optimum use of the resources to enable children learn joyfully and progress. There is no dearth of resource that can be brought into the classroom to supplement the textbook. The only thing required is to show some willingness to undertake initiatives.

Let us reflect

- * Which processes of learning did Anshu focus upon in Case 3?
- * Which additional resources, beside textbooks, can be used in your classroom and why?

4.3 Diverse Context, Need and Resources

4.3.1 Contextualisation

One has to understand that textbooks are just exemplars but there is strong impulse in every teacher to stick to the textbook, which may be very stifling for the child, who may not relate to it and may end up being labelled as a failure. The themes in EVS are universal and all children can relate to it. However, the problem arises when children are not able to identify with the context in the textbook. It is here that the teacher plays an important role in helping the child to understand the textbook by contextualising it. For example:

Case 1

Shyama teaches in a village where water is abundant but still fights are common in the area as water resources are controlled by a particular community. However, a chapter, given in a textbook, deals with water scarcity in an urban setting where the taps run dry quite often, people struggle in long queues and often pick up fights over water procurement. Given the context, what do you think Shyama can do?

Isn't it difficult for Shyama's students to relate to water crisis in urban areas when they do not find such situations in their surroundings? Her students will be benefitted if she contextualizes the learning situations to help children relate to the issues on water prevailing in the village i.e. around the real life of her students. A sensitive teacher can use these situations to highlight discrimination, inequity etc. and help children to ques-

tion these and not accept things in their surroundings as they are.

Case 2



- How many of your students live in such houses?
- Do you also live in such a house?
- How many people in your area live in such houses?
- A student Keya, lives in a one room house with her family of six members. What ideas would such a picture, as above, evoke in her mind? Will she be able to relate to this picture?
- What would you say to the children if they are not able to relate to this picture?

There can be many instances like above, where we are sensitive to how the text or picture might influence the child in the class, who does not identify with it. A textbook may sometimes value only a certain kind of knowledge or a situation or people or community and ignore others for various reasons. Thus the role of the teacher is to contextualize the textbook and come up with a shared understanding of the concept or theme.

Let us reflect

- * Try and write in three sentences your idea of home.
- * Does your idea of home include the dwelling of all your students and people around?

Children may gradually be exposed from immediate to the wider surroundings, for which the experiences may relate more to self and family to neighbourhood and shift towards distant environment, as they progress from classes III to V. However, understanding on issues or concepts is always better if the learning is embedded and related to situations witnessed or experienced. Unfamiliar situations are sometimes abstract for which the foundation needs to be laid first with concrete experiences.

- Could you identify any such activities, text or information in the EVS textbooks that you may or may not use? Elaborate your answer with reasons.

4.3.2 Need of Learners

Read the story of Nita.

Nita teaches class V. She was surprised to find that the children did not know to read or write properly. She decided to focus on their reading and writing skills. The class was not easy to manage as a large number of children were at different levels of reading and writing skills. Every morning she started her class with sharing sessions called *Aaj kee taaza khabar*, which she wrote on one side of the blackboard. Children had

to share something important that happened a day before. For example, a child shared that her mother made halwa, another said, “we ate pao-bhaji from the corner shop”, etc. Nita encouraged group work and tried to do activities in groups. Managing groups at times was daunting and noisy too. Nita took a while and negotiated several times with children and school authorities to establish a different kind of class culture. But soon children learnt to complete work in groups and she encouraged them to present their work to each other. Meanwhile, she made her classroom print-rich – filled it with all kinds of books, games and extensive word walls, which children started using eventually. From early morning sharing of news, she gradually asked students to write about anything that they loved. It was difficult for children to find a topic and write but she did not give them specific themes. Instead she provided suggestions, ideas and options –you can write about the TV serial that you like or movie star or anything else. Students got enthused but were reluctant to show her their notebooks as they feared being judged and made fun of. Nita slowly built an atmosphere which was non-judgemental but supportive and appreciative. Soon the results were evident as the children not only started writing but also began sharing their written pieces. A girl shared that she and her mother were beaten up by her father and as a result she hated him. Another boy shared his woes too. The children were able to empathise with each other and there was a lot of sharing and trust in the class. Due to the changed atmosphere in the class, Nita managed to finish the textbook chapters comfortably. Moreover, she helped the children to relate the textbook chapters to their own experiences. They were also enthused to write about themselves.

Let us reflect

- * Were the activities carried out by Nita beyond textbooks? How? Were these activities meaningful and did they help the children learn?

You might agree that Nita could motivate the children to read and write by allowing them to freely express and share what they felt. They could participate in the activities without any fear and hesitation and could gradually relate to the textbooks which initially they considered an imposition. Coming to school became meaningful for children as the teacher listened to them. It is the teacher’s initiative and agency that can make all the difference to the children.

Refer to the weblink 1, pp. 22-24: www.ncert.nic.in/rightside/links/pdf/framework/english/nf2005.pdf

Let us reflect

- * Nita encouraged group work. What are the advantages of working with children in groups who are at different levels of learning?
- * Write a group activity keeping in mind that only one child in a group is able to read and write fairly as compared to others.
- * It is always easy to give a topic to write on but Nita did not give any? Why?
- * Do you consider Nita’s activities conducted in her classroom as EVS learning? How and why?

To sum up, each child may be having different needs – physical, emotional and social, and these affect their learning in one way or the other. In the early stages, mostly a mother teacher teaches all subjects and spends most of her time with the children. Thus, she is in a good position to identify these needs suitably and help

the children. For example, a student might need your attention more as he/she is unable to understand your instructions, or she wants to go to washroom more often than others, or she comes late as she lives far away from school, or has to leave early, or requires medical help, etc. A teacher must be sensitive and help children address their other needs apart from catering to their cognitive aspects. Thus our role is much beyond the mere transaction of textbooks, which too gets facilitated if we take care of the socio-emotional aspects of children's health.

In the next part of this module, we would look at more resources that can be included in the quest to go beyond textbook.

4.10 References

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4.11 Weblinks

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