



# Cultivating Sensitivities through Environmental Studies (Part II)

- 11.0 Objectives**
- 11.1 Introduction**
- 11.2 Sensitivities in Context**
- 11.3 Celebrating Diversity**
- 11.4 Concern for Equity and Social Justice**
- 11.5 Valuing Traditional Knowledge**
- 11.6 Encouraging Care and Collaboration**
- 11.7 Appreciating Individual Initiatives**
- 11.8 Challenging Stereotypes**
- 11.9 Reflection on Children's Learning**
- 11.10 Let us Sum up**
- 11.11 References**
- 11.12 Weblinks**

## 11.0 Objectives

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

- arrive at various desirable sensitivities that need to be developed in young children;
- build appropriate contexts in EVS for inculcation of these sensitivities; and
- plan your teaching-learning in the light of sensitivities to be cultivated.

This part of the module continues to present ideas that can help build appropriate contexts in EVS classroom for developing desirable sensitivities. This module specifically lays emphasis on the encouraging care and collaboration and taking individual initiatives. It would also talk on challenging stereotypical in class and dealing with these issues sensitively with children. The module will also help you to reflect on your own world views about various issues and help becoming a sensitive about it.

### 11.6 Encouraging Care and Collaboration

A harmonious society thrives on relationships of trust, empathy and understanding among its members. An EVS curriculum must be permeated with these values and underscore them at appropriate junctures. A lesson on disaster management, for instance, cannot only be about its causes or do's and don'ts or mock drills. It has to necessarily include within its realm the cultivation of empathetic understanding and appreciation of citizens' role at such critical times. Not only human-human but also human-animal and human-plant relationships of care and nurturance have to be emphasised. Sensitising children towards ethical treatment of animals is especially important. It is also important to stress that cooperative and collaborative efforts are needed for common good.

Read the following excerpt:

*Ding, Ding, Ding.... As soon as the school bell rang Lawmte-aa, Dingi, Dingima picked their bags and hurried home. On the way they stopped to drink water from a stream in a cup made of bamboo, which was kept there. Today not only the children, even 'Saima Sir' was in a hurry to get back. Today there would be a special meeting of the Village Council (Panchayat). At the meeting there would be a lottery to decide which family will get how much land for farming. The land belongs to the whole village, not to separate people. So they take turns to do farming on different parts of the land. A beautiful pot made of bamboo was shaken well. One chit was taken out. Saima Sir's family got the first chance. He said, "I am happy that my family gets to choose first. But, this year we cannot take more land. Last year I had taken more and was not able to farm it well. After my sister Jhiri got married and went away it is difficult to manage farming alone." Saima Sir asked for 'three tin' of land. Little Mathini asked, "What is three tin of land? Chamui explained, "The land on which we grow one tin of seeds is called one tin of land." One by one, the village families got their piece of land for farming.*

Source: Class V, EVS Textbook, NCERT, pp. 189-90

The students may be asked to find out:

- Which are the states around Mizoram?
- Chamui said they measure land, using tin. Which are the other ways of measuring land?

- Returning from school, children drank water in a bamboo cup. Who do you think would have made this cup and kept it in the forest? Why?
- Have you ever seen anything which people are free to use, with no one there looking after it?

We find that the many understandings are enmeshed within the above narrative and the accompanying exercise. It can help children explore north-eastern states in India, the vegetation and life there, appreciate their traditional knowledge (e.g. farming practices in this case), units of measuring land, process of rural administration, and also understand and feel joint responsibility towards society. It can be furthered if you organise a discussion with your students along the following lines:

- Have you ever ‘owned’ something jointly with someone? What was it?
- When two or more people jointly own something, there is always a fear that one party may benefit more than the other. Have you ever felt the same way?
- How does the division of responsibility help?
- Debate the pros and cons of joint ownership of natural resources by the local people and the state.

### Let us reflect

All people have their own language, songs, dances and other traditional practices.

- \* Do you think that including them in textbooks communicate to the children that their local traditions are important and enjoy legitimacy in classroom?

## 11.7 Appreciating Individual Initiatives

A society is made up of and sustained by individuals. Its collective growth and furtherance depends upon the efforts and initiatives of its members. Many big changes are sometimes brought about by small efforts of people who have drawn their strength from nothing more than their own courage of conviction. These efforts must be recognised by curricula and posed as inspiring life examples before children.

Read the following excerpt from the chapter ‘Every Drop Counts’ of the NCERT Class V EVS textbook. The chapter spans a wide range of concepts and issues such as – sources of water, water conservation, rainwater harvesting, indigenous water conservation practices, water across cultures and unequal distribution of water. Against this backdrop, it finds space to showcase individual and group efforts made in this direction.

*There are some groups that work hard to bring water to the people of different areas. They ask the elders about the water arrangement in their times. They rebuild the old lakes and johads, and also build new ones. Let us see how the group called Tarun Bharat Sangh helped Darki Mai. Darki Mai lives in a village in the Alwar district of Rajasthan. The women of the village used to spend the entire day looking after their home and animals. Sometimes, it took them all night to pull water from the well for animals. In the summer, when the wells dried up, they had to leave the village. Darki Mai heard about this group and asked for help. Together, the people from the group and the village decided to make a lake. The problem of food and water for animals is now less. People get more milk. They have started earning more.*

The above example demonstrates to children how ordinary people can get together to solve common problems. It also reveals the life conditions of several people for whom even easy access to water is a luxury.

### Let us reflect

- \* Do you think it is important for EVS curricula to highlight people's initiatives?
- \* How does inclusion of these initiatives serve the cause of a dynamic and vibrant democracy?
- \* Do you know of any people's campaigns and movements for the cause of environment?
- \* Do you think struggling together for issues such as those concerning the environment or governance brings the members of a society closer and break down socio-economic barriers between them?

Sports can be an appropriate backdrop for talking about the significance of cooperation and teamwork and emphasising how working together as a team is a more efficient way of working. It is important to simultaneously prioritise collaboration over competition. You may organise a discussion with your students along the following lines:

- Have you ever won at a game or a competition? Where?
- How did you feel after winning?
- Have you ever lost at a game or a competition? Where?
- How did you feel after losing?
- One often hears people talk about the 'killer instinct' that one needs to have in order to succeed at any task. Would you agree?

Think of some inter-house events that can be organised in the school in which no team wins or loses.

Sports can also provide a context for challenging various restrictive notions about women's participation in sports and related gender stereotypes.

### 11.8 Challenging Stereotypes

Stereotypes are preconceived notions about people or ways of doing things, which are without acceptable evidence and, therefore, may not reflect reality. Many people are found to hold such unsubstantiated views. If allowed to persist, they can lead people to take irrational and unjust decisions. The process of studying the environment involves an encounter with several of the prevalent biases and stereotypes. These ideas need to be challenged through appropriate selection of the subject matter and teaching-learning activities.

A Class V teacher uses the following narrative in her class on investigating properties of water:

*Mehwish was helping her father clean up the kitchen after dinner. While carrying the used glasses to the sink, she playfully sprinkled some water on the hot tawa still lying on the gas stove. There was a sizzling sound and she was surprised to see the water on the tawa shrink to take a spherical shape. She repeated the act and got the same result. She wondered if this would happen with all the liquids. She proceeded to try it out with vegetable oil.*

The teacher then went on to discuss with her students:

- Have you seen something similar happen?
- Try out the activity with at least three different liquids and share your observations.

You may appreciate that, in the above example, conceptual understanding has been placed in a specific context and the investigation is taking place in a real life situation.

### Let us reflect

- \* Researches on people's ideas about science and scientists have reported a wide prevalence of certain stereotypes about science and scientists, i.e. they have a set view about what science is, how it is done, where it is done and what kind of people scientists are?
- \* Given below are a few such ideas. Consider each one of them carefully. Think whether the above example counters each idea.

Scientists are males.

Scientific investigations are done in laboratory.

Scientific investigations require specialised apparatus and equipment.

- \* Think how Mehwish's example bursts the image of science as an exclusive practice.
- \* Do you see a scope for inculcation of other sensitivities through this example? Which ones?

Before being able to raise these issues sensitively with children, you will have to confront your own stereotypical views and objectively evaluate them. This is not easy but nevertheless critically important.

### 11.9 Reflection on Children's Learning

Sensitivities cannot be 'learnt' and assessed in the same way as concepts. They are imbibed in specific situations and become manifest on particular occasions. Teachers cannot directly teach them but they can create classroom environments to encourage them. They may provide gentle cues as per the need of a given situation. Observing children in varied situations and maintaining anecdotal records can be helpful in assessing children.

### 11.10 Let us Sum up

Environmental Studies offers ample scope for development of various concepts, skills and sensitivities in children. The prime responsibility of the teacher is to create appropriate teaching-learning contexts for development of these within the framework provided by the syllabus. The understandings, skills and attitudes to be developed need to be anchored in any themes or sub-themes, e.g. 'Relationships', 'Work and Play', 'Animals and Plants', 'Food', 'Shelter', 'Water', 'Travel' and 'Things We Make and Do'. Sensitising children to various aspects of environment cannot be a stand-alone activity. These need to be permeated in all teaching-learning activities and it requires a responsive school ethos to be created.

### 11.11 References

1. Looking Around (2014). NCERT Class IV textbook, NCERT Publication, New Delhi
2. Looking Around (2014). NCERT Class V textbook, NCERT Publication, New Delhi

### 11.12 Weblinks

1. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>
2. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/An-endless-fight-against-manual-scavenging/article16039417.ece>

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