Title
Creating Opportunities among the Primary Schools in Chhattishgarh to Fight Poor Learning: Thematic Approach to primary Education, India

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Publication Date
2016

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Creating Opportunities among the Primary Schools in Chhattishgarh to Fight Poor Learning

A SCERT-IFIG Intervention

Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Traditional Education System was based on deductive methods of teaching and learning where teacher was playing the major role. The conventional perception of traditionalist intellectual was for creating reflective few scholars was a top down approach. The social efficiency curriculum is drawn from the behaviouristic approach was influenced by the psychology where the individual intelligence was classified based on race theory and meritocracy perpetuating inequality in education. The social constructive approach propagated the social development theory of curriculum. The current schools of thought in pedagogy thus gained its ground focusing on learning is nothing but experiential. (Schubert). The learner-centered pedagogy respect the individuality of the student as a person and the diversities of students race, gender, class and language are the resource for teachers to accommodate the students socio educational needs based on their context, interest and background.

Paulo Freire, defined pedagogy as an experiential knowledge that is understood critically from the social realities of the individual. Freire established that ‘who ever teach learn in the act of teaching and who ever learn teaches in the act of learning.’ (Freire: 1998:31). He affirmed that teaching is not just a transfer of information and knowledge but it is a critical reflection of practice. (Ibid)

Lev Vigotsky, the constructivist psychologists of Russia, stated that each culture, provides the individual the 'tools of intellectual adaption.' These tools allow children to use their basic mental abilities in a way that is adaptive to the culture in which they live in. His theory of learning advocated on parental/peer involvement in shaping the knowledge of the child popularly known as “zone of proximal development” in which learners who receive help can perform an activity they would not be able to perform by themselves (Illeris: 2009).

Influenced by him, Louis Moll conceptualized the funds of knowledge that the parents and community have to use in the classroom which is best way to relate the experience of the children in schools. The social development theory of Vigotsky led to culturally responsive classroom where “respect for diversity, engage motivation of all learners, create a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment, derive teaching practices from principles that cross disciplines and cultures and promote justice and equity in society” (Phuntsog:102).

Quoting the minority children in classroom as compared to the majority, Jim Cummins’ (1986) explained that “power and status relations between minority and majority groups exert a major influence on school performance” (p.21). Therefore he focused on language of the minority to be used in the school for children’s learning.
Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) conceptualize culturally responsive teaching in terms of four motivational conditions that include: (1) establishing inclusion; (2) enhancing positive attitude; (3) enhancing meaning; and (4) engendering competence. (Phuntsog: 1999:8) Consequently the conventional perception of classroom assuming all the students are equal in the eyes of the teacher was questioned and the students with diverse need, interest and background were emphasized as the pre-requisite of individual learning.

The pedagogical research adopted in later part of 20th century changed the perception of teaching and learning. As a part of global agreement pedagogy was redefined as a joint productive activity; in which learning of language takes place across the curriculum with meaning making, coupled with critical thinking and instructional dialogue between the students and teachers. (Dalton:1998).

Christine Sleeter propagated multicultural education in school involving race, ethnicity and gender and class. Her option for multicultural education remained a viable interpretation of proposals for a variant categorization (Schubert, 2012: 377)

When there is a diversity of culture, race, language and identity, there is a threat of subordinating the minority cultures by the majority in power. People in subordinate culture do follow the institutionalized culture prescribed by the dominant power group which perpetuates the social disparity and systematically assimilate and eliminate the bi-cultural identity. (Darder: 2012: 60). Darder further writes, to address and diversities and reduce social disparity it is necessary to foster cultural democracy where the system reduce the language and educational disabilities through the opportunity to learn in one’s own native language, reinforcing the relationship of the school and the home through a common bond. Projecting the individual in to an atmosphere of personal identification, giving the students a base for success in the field of work and preserving and enriching the cultural and human resources of the people.(Darder: 2012:55-56).

The cultural and linguistic diversities in India needs the schools practicing cultural democracy, recognizing and respecting the co existence of multicultural and multilingual spirit. In India, the National Policy of Education -1986,POA- 1992,NCF- 2005 and RTE - 2009 have envisioned the importance of equitable quality education in this country to provide educational opportunity to all children irrespective of ethnic, cultural and linguistic and religious diversities. Since last two decade the importance of multicultural and multilingual education has been introduced to empower the school children with diverse socio-cultural background. Some steps towards fostering the equity is taken such as providing physical facilities to the children of disadvantaged groups. But in respect of transforming the mind to accommodate the diversities has not yet been made possible in academic domain. Sporadic attempts taken by the states to overcome these inequalities are not enough and needless to say, the institutionalized intervention has not yet been initiated to remove the stereotypes that is ingrained in the curriculum., teachers training and also in every day educational practices. Though it was felt that postcolonial India is heading towards equitable ideologies, current socio-political scenario has disproved it and the social unrest has cropped up in the name of religion,gender,language and ethnicity which is divisive and a great threat to foster cultural democracy.

The teacher education and the school education is at the cross road to accommodate the pedagogical theories and methods as imagined by the nation. The ambiguity of quality and equity has still an uncritical issue in the
schools. It is difficult to decide if the schools is for all the children or to safeguard the ideologies and interest of the majority.

Educational Scenario of Chhattisgarh

The ASER Report 2014 indicates the poor condition of school functioning in Chhattisgarh (35 position in learning achievement) and have shown that the condition of schooling is highly discouraging. (ASER: 2014). Therefore the state is keen to improve the quality of education by introducing APJ Abdul Kalam Gunvatta Abhiyan by engaging the state government departments and academic system in the whole state since last two years. Ostensibly, indicators for this campaign signifies the state concern in the promotion of education, but how it could be achieved is a major areas of intervention which is not discussed.

I. Issues and challenges

Understanding Social Diversities

Chhattisgarh is a state with three distinct cultural areas with multiethnic and multilingual situation. People in Surguja the north of the state speak Surgujiha. Bastar in the south of the state is multilingual in nature with Gondi, Halvi and Durua language. Central Chhattisgarh is dominated by Chhattisgarhi.

Tribal constitute 34 % of the state and the SC constitute 16 % of the state population. Kabir Panthi and Satnam are two religious sects maintaining their cultural identity in the society. Tribal languages are not used in school education to unblock children’s learning in their mother tongue. The multiethnic cultural diversities of the state exhibits the differences of customs and beliefs represented in their fairs and festivals. The teacher education and school education programmes have not yet considered the cultural and linguistic diversities of this state as resources for school learning. Rather the uniform assimilative curriculum has undermined the local cultures.

The context of Chhattisgarh and IFIG Support

In this context, the aim of this paper is to discuss on the challenges in the areas of school and teacher education in Chhattisgarh. The Programme of School and Teacher Education Reform is jointly taken up by the state government and IFIG. The focal theme of this programme is to bring a transformation in school education and teacher education. This is a six year project initiated in 2012 in 100 model schools and 4 DIETs. Out of 100 schools adopted for intervention, 59 schools are primary and upper primary schools is 41.

Teachers from Diverse Cultural Background
Total 460 teachers in 100 model schools are engaged in teaching for 11137 children of 6-14 age groups. Percentage of SC children is 12 and in case of Scheduled tribe it is 28%. Boys constitute 50.18 percent and girls 49.82 percent in these schools.

While 271 teachers teach in 59 primary schools for 6125 students with a pupil teacher ratio of 22.6, 189 teachers teach in 41 upper primary schools to 5012 students and the PTR is 26.5. The socio-cultural composition of the teachers is 67 percent in case of SC/ST and OBC and 33 percent belong to others caste. Out of these 59.53 teachers are female and 40.65 are males. 95 percent teachers are trained.

Table -

<table>
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<th>ST</th>
<th>OBC</th>
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(Source: IFIG, Chhattisgarh, SCERT, Raipur)

Language Diversities in CG

Hindi is the medium of instruction in the whole state. The state has a MLE policy formulated in 2007, and have developed primers in 6 local languages. The MLE policy of the state is to use twenty five percent of the text in respective mother tongue of the children from class I - V. But these 6 languages are used in class III to V. Thus out of 25 lessons in language books, 5-6 lessons are in Halvi for Bastar region, Gondi for Kanker region and Gondi for Dantewada region, Chhattisgarhi for central Chhattisgarh, Kurukh and Surgujiah for Northern Chhattisgarhi region. But in Class I and II there is no provision of teaching the students in these identified languages. Thus there is a policy gap of initiating MT in Class III-V instead of class I and II

1. Socio-Linguistic Situation in Schools
In the linguistic survey in 100 schools, it is found that 46.51 percent teachers are Hindi speaker. In Bastar region percentage of Halvi speaking teachers is 25.58 and the number of Halvi students are 78.71. Similarly in Sarguja 90.59 percent students speak Surgujia and 51% teachers speak Surgujia. Number of Oram teachers is 12.61, and Bhojpuri teachers is 21.52% in Sarguja district.

In Kabirdham 96.20% children speak Chhattisgarhi and the number of teachers speaking Chhattisgarhi is 80%. In Mahasamund 92 percent children speak Chhattisgarhi and the number of Chhattisgarhi teachers is 81.97 which are quite encouraging to find the classroom more communicative.

It is clear that the students and teachers ratio in Kabirdham and Mahasamund are comfortable for teacher students interpersonal communication skill, in Bastar it is just reversed. 46% Hindi teachers are engaged in teaching learning process for 78% Halvi and 1.26 Gondi students.
Text Books

Though the language text book in class I and II is projected as child centered, the design is conventional. Text and exercise is the focus in the book and the intention is to teach letters and words from the text. The basic idea of learners socio-cultural context is missing and the opportunity to learn in the diverse classroom is guided by the teachers conventional teaching. The text book written in Hindi does not help the students to explore their own experience in their own cultural and linguistic context. More exercise has been emphasized in class I and II. There is a lack of self learning activities. More emphasis is on teachers directives to students.

Understanding pedagogy in School Context: Global Consensus

According to Benavot “education and learning has been systematically disentangled and differentiated from literacy and numeracy and rote and closed initiation-response-feedback structure has been introduced in school education system. This is a systematic departure from experiential knowledge and learning from the basics of global pedagogy” (Benavot et al, 1991, Alexander 2001, and 2006 b).

Standards of Pedagogy

The global consensus on standards of pedagogy (1998, CREDA) is based on five principles. These are
1. Facilitate learning through joint productive activity among teacher and students.
2. Developing Language and Literacy Across the Curriculum (LLD)
Iii. Making Meaning: Connecting School to Students’ Lives and connect teaching and curriculum with experiences and skills of students’ home and community.

Iv. Teaching Complex Thinking (CT) and challenge students toward cognitive complexity.

v. Teaching through Instructional Conversation (IC) Engage students through dialogue, especially the Instructional Conversation. (Dalton: 1998)

**Standards of Curriculum**

The Andhra Pradesh State Curriculum Framework- 2010 has made a simple but intensive exercise on these standards such as I. content standard, ii. Process standard and iii. Out come standard.

Content Standard: The content standard includes comprehension, reasoning, responding and reflection of children followed by reading, understanding and analysis and self-reading and writing, creative discourses,

Teaching Standard: This intends to make the classroom more student centric, working on time on task, use of subject based methods and techniques by the teachers. Besides the students’ self learning after a certain period, use of TLM and environment as resources and making the classroom interactive and finally ensure fullest participation of all children

Outcome Standard: This entails ensure children’s reading, writing, numeracy with engagement of mind in learning activities Increase in enrolment and attendance of students and teachers, both. Children are able to read, write, manipulate sums and express freely. Teachers are able to connect the experiential knowledge of children in the class room transaction through activities and break the barriers of monotony. Children become more reflective, happy and free from fear of asking questions and teachers have a quest to know the children beyond the class rooms and finally emergence of students as self-learners. (APSCF-2011)

**Quality of Teaching**

Robin Alexander (2008) in his research work on Indian SSA programme has discussed on the quality of education by offering a fifty years of chronological conceptions about the quality defined globally.

These dimensions are learner characteristics and the learner’s context, enabling inputs in schools, teaching and learning dimension and outcomes dimension. NCERT during (2007) made a framework with eight dimensions known as Quality monitoring tool (QMT) These are School infrastructural facilities, School management and community support, School and classroom environment, Curriculum and teaching learning materials (TLMs), Teacher and teacher preparation, Classroom practices and processes, Opportunity time (teaching-learning time), Learners’ assessment, monitoring and supervision. (Alexander: 2008)

**II. Creating Opportunity**

After setting the goal of addressing the schools with learner centered pedagogy the strategies adopted to create a community of learning with the children, teachers, CRC, BRC, parents and community members. Opportunity can remove deprivation and empower the people through developing the student’s capabilities. The focus was on reform in class I and II curriculum, text book and bring a learner centered classroom practices in 59 primary schools followed by teachers training and practices on learner centered teaching.
A series of activities were undertaken by the SCERT and IFIG in the state. Besides adopting 100 model schools the SCERT had adopted 4 DIETs as subject resource centers taking four core curricular areas and recruited subject experts and Block Coordinators. Besides, the exposure visit to the teachers, tapping resources from Eklavya and other national organizations, conducting national seminar on thematic issues and induction of teachers of different subject areas are some of the interventions that has created an opportunity to the teachers to promote their professional career. In 2014-15, about 460 teachers took part in workshop on understanding pedagogy and classrooms transaction. In 2015-16 the SCERT adopted Thematic Approach in class I and II in which 108 teachers from class I and II were oriented on preparation of language and math materials for their classes. Teachers were trained on curriculum and text book writing, prepare training module for their fellow teachers and the basics of learner centered pedagogy. It was a new experience for the teachers to prepare text materials for class I and II for their own schools and the training methods and approaches. This was an empowerment to the teachers to think of their own capabilities and make themselves competent for the pedagogical work.

Besides, the story telling festivals in 100 schools for two consecutive years covering 22000 students and 450 community story tellers, documenting the stories in local languages and use them in school curriculum and storytelling sessions in the classrooms has shown good results.

Multilingual Education

To address the Durua children in Bastar the Language Resource Center in the DIET has prepared bilingual primer in Durua-Hindi language for class I and II and introduced in 40 schools since last two years. (IFIG 2014-15) Besides, seminar on tribal education in Bastar was a major efforts to promote linguistic inclusion of tribal children in remote areas of the state. It is necessary to remove the deprivation by creating opportunity by empowering the teachers and students with the new pedagogical aspects and bring a change in educational domain.

III. Process and Practice

The SCERT core group decided to adopt thematic approach in the model schools and the DIETs also formed the core groups with the model school teachers, BRC, CRC and DIET faculties. The exercise of teacher in preparation of theme web and cultural themes for the curricular areas were prepared by the teachers. Teachers prepared it and teach the students of their schools with these materials. Thus they understand the purpose and meaning of the text and to prepare these materials, necessary academic support was provided by the state IFIG team.

The opportunity created in the school education network is six fold which is discussed in details.
1. School Community Linkage

The funds of knowledge and cultural context of education is based on community knowledge. Family members as the source of knowledge can have a lot to contribute to the experiential learning of the child which is helpful to learn in school context. According to Genzuk, the funds of knowledge found in the household could form the basis for curriculum units in science, math, language arts, and other subjects. (Genzuk: 1999:10) Thus the activities like storytelling, singing, music, carpentry, village craft, gardening were introduced in the schools. The experience of opening museum by the villagers, and the involvement of story tellers of the village in the school storytelling festival attracted the experienced people of the village, also the parents to perform their oral knowledge in schools. In Chhattisgarh, during last two years, 22000 school children took part in community storytelling in which over 450 story tellers of 100 villages told their stories and it were documented by the school children. This brought the oral knowledge of the community to the school in written form. Story tellers got recognized in schools. The stories were used in the schools for preparation of text in class I and II.

Setting School Museum:

In 10 schools, items of culture from ancient to modern time were donated by the villagers and school museums were set up. This encouraged the villagers to narrate the items of culture to the school students and the visitors. Villagers collected their history and culture and reconstructed their village history. A historical consciousness and the social history of the village is established in the village to analyze the past life of the people and compare it with the present. Senior persons played a major role in donating the heritage materials from their home for the museum and also narrated the village history before the teachers and students. Museum was a new concept in schools of Chhattishgarh. These activity helped the younger generations to get exposure to their heritage. Both the senior and junior generation got the opportunity to restore and recapitulate their social history, without which they could have lost their social history.

2. Teacher Preparation and understanding pedagogy
The teacher training content was designed based on the findings of the teachers initial attitude, belief, knowledge, need, interest, concepts related to their training needs. These include the basics of pedagogy, classroom transaction process, subject teaching methods, and assessment methods. Teachers socio-cultural background, qualification, need and interest are contributory factors for teaching profession. Teachers were oriented to develop their professional growth by critical thinking through discussion to make them self responsible in teaching profession.

The discussion made with the teachers was diagnostic and interactive eliminating the hierarchy of trainer and trainee. Their own perception and anguish of being a teacher in the current system as opposed to their ethical responsibilities for the development of children was the major issue. But not all teachers are serious in their profession. The role they play for human intellectual development, the long term effect of a good teacher in the individual and society, the hopes and aspiration of a teacher for her own personal and professional growth, the ethics and morals that affects the personality of a teacher, the process of teaching different subjects were the topics of discussion. The human and social loss that the non performing teachers and the damage of not performing one’s own responsibilities even after adopting teaching profession was also discussed. The question was also posed, who else are the persons in the society, other than the teachers to compensate the role of a teacher, and also question, if the teaching in classroom is a pretended labour. Truly, the teachers came up with their anguish and anger that were genuine, but being in the system, how it was necessary to accommodate the challenges in a collective manner and not to harm one’s own social progress and the development of children. Rather they decided to accept the realities in the system and gradually bring a change in the future of one’s own society.

They also felt that since they are to work in the system for the whole life and they cannot deny the truth. They also expressed that, it is always better to serve with dignity than to serve without dignity. Being sensitized they agreed to imagine a utopia, formed the groups and believed that they will change the change they want through a collective efforts. The idea was that instead of singing the glory of Bharat Mat, it is necessary to serve the children of Bharatmata those who are in the darkness of ignorance and illiteracy.

They also revealed that their collective efforts in promoting their academic development could create solidarity in the larger system and they have courage to work. But it was not known to them how to start the journey and what are the elements of such a journey through they can bring a change.

Next the academic need of the teacher was discussed. Most of them agreed that they have hardly any exposure to the NCF/ national goal of education except teaching the book in the schools without using any theory or methods. Even though they are trained, they have hardly any scope to use it, since the ideals of the teacher education is different from the realities of diverse and multiple school situations surrounded with a lot of imposing limitations.

Revealing the weak side of their teaching profession teachers said that, they are only told about child centered learning, participatory learning, inductive methods, group activities and so on, but in fact these are the buzz words they have continuously listening the theories but they hardly find any practice in the training. They also told that the trainings are disjointed, without contributing or complementing to each other. For instance the teacher centered approach in comparison to learner centered approach is not clearly articulated with example or in a real classroom situation through which teachers can get a clear picture and model of teaching.

The questions of teachers were to know about the current teaching learning practices and to know how to connect the experiences of the children with school knowledge? The question of creation of knowledge was discussed through a group work where the knowledge comes from? How people create knowledge? What is its
function in the society? How the environment is instrumental to construct knowledge in the mind of the human being? Association of mind with the matter creates knowledge, validated by the community and thus culture is created. The nature – culture relation in respect of geography, people, society, family, science, socio-economic and political life, religion, art and creativity etc are the sum total of knowledge that is shaped in the productive and meaningful practices of the people. Community validates the inventions and discoveries and that becomes community knowledge.

Being asked if there is any evidence of knowledge in their region, teachers denied, but when group discussion was conducted, forming six to eight areas of culture, teachers came up with lots of local knowledge.

Regarding the teaching methods and techniques of different subjects, they expressed that they don’t have any idea about how to teach adopting learner centered approach. Some teachers admitted that, in fact the training content of teachers orientation is not applied in schools and it is not only they, but their superiors also avoid the pedagogical part.

The most challenging task among the traditional teachers is a shift from teacher centered approach to learner centered approach. It was not an easy task to introduce it and though teachers understand the philosophy, they hardly abandon the earlier practice. Another shift was from letter centered teaching to content centered learning. About 99% teachers believe that unless there is alphabet – word – sentence sequence of language learning, no child can learn reading. This was also challenged through adopting story track approach and it was demonstrated that a teacher or a child can read a text if she has understood the text from the context and meaning. Reading can only be possible when the student has able to understand the whole text through experiencing it, discussing it in their own context and get meaning out of it. Reading and writing are the bi-product of learning. The richness of Indian school is its environment where children can have experiential learning, where teachers speak about known to unknown or concrete to abstract, they don’t connect it from experience of the child to textual learning, or from comprehension to conceptualization of learning since they don’t see the knowledge outside the classroom. Thus it was necessary to discuss on these theories of deductive to inductive, concrete to abstract and from textual to experiential conceptual knowledge. Teachers need was to understand the teaching learning philosophy, methods and approaches.

The training context of the teachers were designed by the resource person and the teachers and teacher educators.

i. Initially, the basics of pedagogy, stages of curriculum reform (classical, behaviouristic, social efficiencies, social constructivists, experiential, and reconciliatory) and its philosophy of teaching, methods of teaching different subjects in primary classes, differences between teacher centered classroom and learner centered classroom,

ii. Source of knowledge: How knowledge is experiential and it is a creation of human mind from the environmental and cultural context. Teachers explored their knowledge system from their natural and socio-cultural environment and agreed that they and children have a prior funds of knowledge. The myth of written over the oral knowledge and school knowledge as a part of greater socio-cultural knowledge was also questioned.

iii. Understudying the children with diverse social background: Assuming all children are alike was removed when the teachers discussed on case studies of tribal child, girls child, child labour, Dalit child, differently-abled child, a child weak in mathematics. This helped them revealing the diverse situation and conditions of children with learning difficulties and how the classroom is unaware of it. A perception of teachers
changed when they found that each child has her own learning potentialities different or similar to each other. This session was also discussed on how children learn.

iv. Induction on standards of pedagogy, quality of learning, classroom transaction, teaching as a socio-cultural act, power and subjugation in education, knowledge construction, critical thinking, group activity, cultural resources, community knowledge, teaching methods and approaches, thematic approach, school community linkages, making a text from the community tales,

v. Learning language in social domain and academic domain: How language, math and environment are learnt using the community resource.

vi. Training on how to prepare a text from the community tale.

Each story is selected based on natural, social and cultural environment. The text is edited to make it suitable for grade I and II, with 8 – 10 sentences and illustrations. Each sentence representing a picture to associate the visuals with sentences. Oral, aural and visual communication is presented to the children at first and then the children, when understand the text, associate their experience with the characters, events, place and time of her own village environment and thus reimagining the text in her mind and recreate the text.

When the same text is given in picture and sentence form, the child narrates the tale in sequence of the events and pictures thus able to read the sentence word to word without even identifying the letters. This is the association of understanding on oral with written form. Thus reading of a written text is meaningful. The particular story in the cognitive and meta-cognitive mind of the child gets space and children creates new texts out of it associating her own imagination and reasoning.

When sentences are read out with understanding and meaning, words get meaning from the sentences, and letters (though each letter is meaningless in isolation) are decoded by the child from the words. The sound of the letter has no meaning, but the child associate the individual sound and constructs a new word from her own cultural context. Thus a child get the whole text and from text to sentence, sentence to words and words to letter in a given text. After this the recoding of letters from the given words and letters helps the child to create new meaningful words

The comprehension side of the text is not exactly to memories, but the reasoning, thinking, logic, creativity, imagination and enquiry of new ideas are the possibilities that reveals the critical thinking i.e. why and how of the text, to associate this with the realities of life.

Teacher centered teaching was based on rote method and letter centered learning. Traditionally, knowledge was acquired through this method, but over the last 50 years, research on language and learning has changed a lot and it has come through a teacher centered, deductive method (such as direct method, translation method, grammar method, structural approach, audio-lingual, communication approach, whole-part and finally context specific methods) to communicative and experiential approach. The departure from rote / letter centric learning to context and meaning generated language methods and approach has inducted to teachers across the time, especially in school education has a big challenge and the frequent changes of methods and approaches has created a big confusion among the teachers. The reason is being, any item of new approaches have been seen as an isolated one from the other and the reason of its continuity and change is not clarified to the teachers. Un-equipped with such a confused ideas teachers don’t get any platform where such theoretical and methodological issues are resolved and that remain in the mind of the teachers.
3. Using Cultural Theme in Classroom

A theme is an item of cultural resources of the children’s everyday life experience. While it is experiential in the society, it is academic in the schools. A cultural theme drawn from the natural and socio-cultural environment can take the shape of a curricular theme and rebuild into a learning item (story/song/pictures). The story/song as the form and its teaching must bind the students and help children to imagine the story in their mental image.

The thematic approach in primary classes is to provide the children a un-fragmented and uniform knowledge from the community that helps them in combining the ideas and concepts in a text. The text is from the community so the relation of the community with the schools is established. The thematic text is also presented to the children in the language of the child at first and then to connect with the school language to establish communication with the students and teachers. It is based on the experience of the children so the children can understand the text and go beyond the text books. Children take part in many activities to elicit knowledge and skills and social values. In thematic approach there is scope for the teachers and students to create more activities and learning opportunities. The feature of thematic approach in classroom ensure child’s understanding and active dialogue with peers and teachers. It links child’s experience with the classroom knowledge and explores the inside out of the children rather than outside in. Teachers and students use to manage the time meaningfully and the participation is active in this method. Multiple learning materials are used in this approach. Community/parents knowledge is used in the school and thus children share their stories with their parents. Knowledge and skill are achieved through learning and literacy.

Class I-II Language Learning

Modern language educator, after research and application has shown that it is the experience of the children along with their known knowledge and context matters in learning. It is through experience that knowledge is created in a given context, with meaning and understanding. After that reading and writing becomes easy. But instead of focusing on experience, knowledge, context of the child, when a text, unfamiliar to the child is taught in a classroom, it becomes teacher’s centric. Any item of learning, that is un-contextual to children’s experiential knowledge is ought to be a failure in reading and writing. It is experimented among the students of classes I and II that, the text (experience story of the child / cultural story), if taught through pictures, orally interacted between the children and teachers with context and meaning, children understand and internalize the text through deciphering meaning out of the text. Once the content of the text is understood, the child can easily read it out and thus without identifying the letter, word or sentence, they read the whole sentence. Then comes the decoding of sentences, word and letter. This approach has been a great success among the class I and II children, since children are given a lot of stories to listen and tell and then read and write in the classroom. For this teacher need to work out what is the interest of the children and their need. She also need to identify the objective of the text to be presented through picture (big-book). Then the children can read and understand the text without adopting a traditional approach to language learning.

The purpose of the learning is for cognitive development of children corresponding to their imagination, reasoning, thinking, creativity, curiosity and enquiry and memory. But barring memory, other aspects of mental activities are ignored in the learning system. The major role of the teacher is therefore to understand that the thought and mind connected to experience and knowledge. Language is the communication devise and reading
and writing is the device of capturing and disseminating the learning. The stories collected from the story telling festivals were used to prepare Big Book, small books, listening stories and experience stories, number story, math story and nature myth etc. Riddles on math and EVS were also collected and used to generate skill and knowledge. All these materials were prepared first in mother tongue and in Hindi. The first step was teacher training on material preparation. Prior to it they had been oriented with the pedagogical matters during 2014-15, so during 2015-16 they were trained on preparation of learning materials for the students for their own schools. in 2016-17 the teachers of model schools prepared theme based materials for class III and IV dividing the whole year into 30 weeks and 3 weeks classroom based assessment.

In the targeted schools thematic approach is used for teaching language and math from the same story. Thus 30 stories for each class were selected from the community stories and those were edited to prepare Big Books. The purpose of lesson is to create a learning opportunity to the children adopting various activities from which the children could learn the desired out come as indicated in the state syllabus. The approach is different from the state text books, but the outcome the application of learner centered pedagogy.

Let’s take example of a bird. A bird is a theme and the story of a bird can be the best genre for teaching language, EVS and Math since the children have a lot of experience on bird in their everyday life.

We can give an example of a story for this theme: The Crocodile and the Hen

A hen went to a river to drink water. A crocodile came out of the water and said the hen, I w’ll eat you. The hen said, you are my brother, How can you eat me/
The crocodile let her allow to go.
Another day the same event was repeated. The hen came and while taking water the crocodile reminded her.
But the hen mustered courage and said, brother, I am your sister. I have told you earlier.
The crocodile allowed her to go. Mean while a lizard came near him.
The crocodile, being perplexed asked, can you tell me how I became the brother if a hen.
The lizard said with a smile. Oh this is a silly question. You and hen both are born from the egg. So you and the hen are brother and sister.
The crocodile nodded his head.

Teachers were asked to prepare lesson and after they prepared it, the purpose of preparation of a lesson and its teaching was not difficult to them. The assumption is to prepare more texts from the community knowledge and enrich the students with optimum exploration of natural and socio-cultural knowledge. TLM is therefore a free resource for the children of primary stage, to avail from the environment.

Distribution of themes for the academic sessions

The teacher can analyze the story and get knowledge like cultural values, and knowledge on ecology and teach as the main objective for the students and teacher reading and writing skill as the bi – product of the text. Thus the curricular theme has been prepared drawing stories and songs from the cultural context of the children and have been written in their mother tongue and also in Hindi language.

The whole academic year is divided in to 33 weeks, out of which 30 weeks is for learning in classrooms and three weeks for three term classroom assessment for primary classes. Each lesson represent a theme and a
story and song is selected to fit in to the theme of the text book of the state. The curricular theme in class I and II is language and mathematics and for class III- IV it is as followings.

General theme (4 core subjects and co-curricular activities)
Language Theme (knowledge and skills (Reading /Writing / Listening / Speaking Classroom learning)
Math Theme (counting/shapes and size/measurement/ data handling)
EVS (inbuilt in language and math content)
Cultural Activities: from class I – V (Music, storytelling, art and craft, traditional and modern games and sports, village study, nature study, health and value education and one act play etc.)

Tapping cultural activities in school and classrooms:
The division of curricular and co-curricular syllabus in school made the cultural knowledge subordinate and optional and segregated the cultural knowledge from the curricular knowledge and not promoted. In fact cultural activities have rich cognitive aspects that shapes the children’s intellectual, emotional and social development. The importance of cultural methods of learning rather helps the students and teachers to rebuild their methods of learning in classroom.

4. Preparation for Culturally Responsive Classrooms

Teachers after the series of workshops on the above aspects prepared text materials for the class I and II children. The multilingual approach was applied to facilitate the children to learn in their mother tongue and in Hindi.

Teachers were engaged in preparation of culturally responsive study materials for the children drawing the stories from the findings of storytelling festivals. Besides, community resources (oral resources tales, songs, riddles, traditional games, organizing story telling festivals, and games,) were also used as text materials.

Teachers prepared 30 story books and its teaching plan for the whole academic year to provide optimum learning opportunity to the children. They also prepared teacher training module to orient the teachers on learner centered pedagogy, using thematic approach to connect experiential learning of the children, putting the five standards of pedagogy as the undermining philosophy embedded in the teaching methods. After this they decided to introduce School Based Assessment as a part of teaching practice to avoid the conventional summative evaluation.

Classroom Transaction Strategies (managing the teaching time with meaningful engagement of children in learning)

Teaching Learning Approach should be such that it should fulfill the following conditions.
Cover curricular areas 4 core subjects and skills and cultural areas
Meaningful engagement of teaching time (300 minutes in day, 1800 minutes in a week, 54000 minutes in 220 days in a year in conformity with the content areas to achieve the learning skill of different subjects.
Meaningful use of time in the class by the teacher and students make a joint productive activity for understanding on learning with inbuilt assessment.
Use local resource from the environment in classroom, students as collector of TLM, in addition to teachers efforts with the help of the DIETs and IFIG team. Regular updating of knowledge and skill on pedagogical aspects.

5. Monitoring and academic support: The SCERT as the apex body has a Unit of school and Teacher Education programme to support the innovations in 100 model schools under intervention. The academic decision and innovations are discussed and decided by the SCERT and the DIET faculties along with the teachers of 100 schools. The link between the schools and DIET and BRC and CRC was literally forged to examine how the academic and administrative sector works together for a cause. DIET faculties along with the model school teachers conduct monthly resource day meeting, conduct subject based training on language, math, and environment science, conduct linguistic survey, tap community resources (storytelling festival, documenting village history, opening school museum, assignment and projects in these schools). The pre service teacher students are involved with the school teachers in preparation of learning materials (big book, story book, story map etc) and BRC and CRC regularly monitored the schools and its classroom transaction. Initially there was a resistance from the teachers and monitoring group, but witnessing the effective learner’s achievement in subjects breaking the monotony of a conventional classroom, they supported it. However, people those who are not a part of the process are still suspicious about it.

6. School-based Assessment

While the primary mandate of this Focus Group was to suggest reforms for exams (as opposed to all assessment), we would like to make a brief plea for the importance of school-based assessment, and hope we can strengthen it in the medium term. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE):

A school-based continuous and comprehensive evaluation system be established in order to

- reduce stress on children,
- make evaluation comprehensive and regular,
- Provide space for the teacher for creative teaching,
- Provide a tool for diagnosis and for producing learners with greater skills.

The CCE scheme should be simple, flexible, and implementable in any type of school from the elite one to a school located in rural or tribal areas. Keeping in view the broad principles of the scheme, each school should evolve a simple suitable scheme involving its teachers, and owned by the teachers.

Keeping internal assessment honest: The question of how to keep schools honest in internal grading is a burning one. Without guarantees of such honesty, end-users of board mark sheets have little interest in it. (NCF2005)

Reflection

After the introduction of thematic approach in class I and II, regular teaching, monitoring through monthly resource day meeting, regular classroom support were provided along with induction training to the teachers and students from time to time.

In the adopted schools, the curriculum and textbook were contextualized and the classroom transaction strategies were also devised which gave a close relation between the students and teachers. The learning became a joint productive activity with meaning making and critical thinking through the instructional conversation between the students and teachers by using mother tongue and local culture to cut across all the subjects in a theme. Thus
learning became productive for cognitive development of the children from their own cultural context and the fear and hesitation in learning was removed.

Teachers broke the monotony of writing daily diary and were engaged in explaining the strength and weaknesses of the children during classroom interaction and identified one to one students capabilities, learning difficulties and tried to solve it from their inter personal relation. Teachers assessed each and every child due to their engaged learning activities, which brought a new realization among the teachers to feel that teaching is a learning activity for both the teacher and learner. Teachers were happy in exploring the curious, witty and peculiar philosophical questions put by the children which were difficult for the teachers to answer. (For instance, why the crow is black and why the heron is white? Children know from an etiological tale due to certain event the crow became black and heron became white, but the question of a child to the teacher was, before the crow and heron became black and white, what were their colors?

School based assessment thus did emphasis on the enquiry based question answer through dialogue and not just by collecting conventional answer. The teachers affinity with the students improved after using thematic approach in story / picture / song / action form. Individual and group activities were the source of the active engagement of the children. Thus teachers distinguished the student’s performance through multiple activities to judge their ability to talk, personality, nature, manner, their level of grasping the knowledge and power of explaining in pressure free situation. Even the teachers identified the weak and irregular students with in the classroom and reported the parents. They also keep track of all the children during weekly assessment.

The assessment were weekly with 20 indicators (10 for the language, 6 for mathematics and 4 for the culture). But teachers expressed that their time is spent in coding and documenting the performance status result that is too early for class I and class II students and at last 3 quarterly assessments could be practical. Abiding by the group consensus is monthly resource day meeting, the idea of weekly monitoring was dropped, but the teachers weekly impression note on children’s performance continued. This helped the teachers to ease in engaging more time in teaching and learning.

The indicators of assessment
In addition to 180 days of teaching throughout the year, another 3 weeks were spared for classroom based assessment. The indicators for class I language were a) look and speak b) look and read c) see, read and write d) associate object with words e) identify the letter from the word and sentence f) read and identify the word from the sentence g) recite a song and tale h) fill up the blanks i) look at the picture and tell the story j) associate the identical words or connecting words k) listen and write l) Draw the picture from the text m) Total physical response

The indicators for math in class I was a) classification b) pre-number concepts c) counting (1-9) d) number relation e) writing the numbers f) filling up the missing numbers g) pattern.

Class II language indicators were a) recite the story and song from the big book b) responding the questions from the story (big book) c) reading the sentence d) connecting the words to make sentences e) identifying words from the sentence f) identify and write g) fill up the blanks h) draw picture i) Total physical response (English and Hindi)

In Mathematics for class II, the indicators were a) Counting b) number relations c) writing the numbers d) identifying the numbers e) odd – even numbers f) simple addition g) simple subtraction h) word problems i) patterns.
The inbuilt indicators were the objectives of the state syllabus and the texts were prepared based on these indicators. The performance of children developed during the classroom transaction was only to assess the understanding of children’s concept, understanding of text, its purpose and meaning based on their own experiences and the new knowledge exposed to them in the classroom. Thus it was neither a controlled examination to get the desired correct answer for the teacher nor it was a difficult exam phobia situation for the children. The whole assessment was known to the teachers and the students were unaware of it.

The quarterly assessment was organized in the classroom in a way that students should not guess that they are being assessed. It was like a normal classroom like any other school day and within a week all the individual student’s performances adopting 20 point indicators were assessed. Optimum honesty was maintained to explore the realities of teacher’s efforts in teaching and to see the results, not to bank upon data, but to analyze the student’s performance. Teacher’s self analysis was also interestingly revealed many unexplored experiences, which they had not imagined in their earlier teaching.

The performance outcome of the language and mathematics are enclosed as Annexure I, II, III and IV.

Impact: Access and retention, quality intervention, active engagement of children, teacher’s self discovery, creating a learning community in school for further quest and enquiry, teachers as practitioners of pedagogy.

The assessment format was prepared by the teachers teaching in the schools. Initially weekly assessment format was introduced for 5 weeks, but the teachers reported in the monthly resource day meeting that they are more engaged in the documentation than in teaching, so it was stopped and quarterly assessment tool were prepared. Annually three assessment were taken up in the interval of three months. Each assessment was taken up for a week in which the curricular and cultural assessment were taken up oral and written for each child. This was handled in a way that the students did enjoy it as their normal classroom. There was no declaration of assessment week in the schools. Thus the teachers engaged in the teaching to the classroom students were instrumental to assess them and there was no pressure of disciplinary action.
Number of students in different Grades
59 RIE Schools - 3rd Quarterly Assessment - March 2016

Percentage of Students

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class-I</th>
<th>Class-II</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 50%</td>
<td>93.48</td>
<td>95.62</td>
<td>94.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 65%</td>
<td>72.05</td>
<td>78.28</td>
<td>75.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 80%</td>
<td>34.20</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>38.04</td>
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Difficulties: It is always not easy to introduce any innovation in a larger system, since innovations are always a challenge to the status quo and it is always difficult to accept, convince, offer more time than the conventional one, taking risk and going against the mainstream to establish a creative work. While the state government is ready to allow such innovations, DIET faculties, teachers and CRCs are some time reluctant to accept the innovations and show their rigidity which discourage the innovative teachers. It is also found that when the teachers of these schools have clarity of theory and practice of learner centered classroom transaction, through their endeavours and interest, their monitors having little exposure to such approaches do clash and they also discourage. All these are of course not discussed in the academic domain to maintain the balance between the authority of power over the authority of knowledge, the teachers do understand it and they overcome such hurdles, since they have a readiness to face any type of hurdles in their journey. Needless to say, it is the government teachers who had little interest and identity to serve their students, now they are ready to accept any challenge to make their children. Teachers’ commitment to learn while teaching and teach while learning has become a reality. The threat is of course, in future, is there, if the innovations are not patronized by the authority. DIET faculty commented MGML failed, but could not understand that the MGML is not failed but they made the MGML failed due to their unpreparedness to accept the innovations.

Conclusion

The SCERT and the 4 DIETS of Chhattisgarh have given the mandate to the primary teachers to take leading role in bringing these innovations in to realities. Classroom culture has brought a new realization among the teachers and students. Children are free to interact with the teachers, and teachers have explored the potentialities of the students. Every day teachers explore the new anecdotes exploring the children’s creativity which surprised them. Teacher’s revelation on students learning and creativity, inquisitiveness has broken the myth of ‘government schools as nonfunctioning agency’. It was found that given right opportunity, professional skill, and motivation to the teachers, understanding the dynamics and politics of education, they can come forward to fight the inaction in schools and foster human values, since they believe that teaching is a human activity and it is for democratic values.

The activities like Story telling festivals, opening readers club in schools, wall painting in classrooms on thematic texts, taking reading sessions across the classrooms, learning from the painted stories in the walls, organizing sports activities, setting up museums and documenting oral history of the villages, organizing science and math mela and TLM workshops are some of the major activities that promote multicultural and multilingual society in schools irrespective of caste, gender and class. These activities are organized by the model school teachers to communitising the learning in village and schools. The responses of children and teachers reveal the challenges the teachers have taken and made the learner centered classroom possible.

End Notes

i “Assuming that the households of students are rich repositories of accumulated knowledge, teachers will conduct ethnographic school, home and community visits with the purpose of uncovering local knowledge bases. Rather than learning static ideas about their students’ “culture,” teachers can access firsthand the lived experiences of household histories and practices. This community-based knowledge can then be transformed by teachers into thematic units within the content areas of the curriculum. https://literacyinquiry.wikispaces.com/Funds+of+Knowledge

ii i.Learner characteristics dimension [aptitude, perseverance, school readiness, prior knowledge, barriers to learning]
ii. Contextual dimension [economic, cultural, national policy, requirements and standards, resources, infrastructure, time, expectations, etc.]

iii. Enabling inputs dimension [teaching and learning materials, physical facilities, human resources, school governance]

iv. Teaching and learning dimension [learning time, teaching methods, assessment/ feedback/incentives, class size]

v. Outcomes dimension [literacy, numeracy and life skills, creative and emotional skills, values, social benefits]

(UNESCO, 2004: 36)

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