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## Use of Resources in the Teaching-learning of Environment Studies

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### ABSTRACT

*Teaching just through chalk-and-talk method does not allow the child to explore the world the way it exists and in its entirety. This is particularly true about subjects like Environmental Studies where the essence of the subject lies in hands-on exploration of the surroundings. However, due to multiple reasons, the teaching-learning of this subject many a time gets restricted merely to reading and writing. This paper discusses how resource management is very crucial for a teacher teaching Environmental Studies and how appropriately chosen resources can make learning both meaningful and engaging. One needs to understand that resources can be of several kinds and one need not just restrict to the use of common resources listed in the books. The teacher should know how to locate, procure and use resources in the best interest of her/his learners. The paper is written on suggestive lines and it partly draws from my experience of working with young learners in primary and elementary classes.*

### Introduction

Teaching-learning process thrives upon the use of a diverse range of resources and a teacher is instrumental in not only deciding which resources to use in her/his class but also to procure them. Often teachers are heard complaining that there is a scarcity of resources and it adversely affects their teaching. However, there is a need to probe deeper into the

meaning that we assign to ‘resources’ as such and interrogate whether our own perceptions of ‘resources’ are skewed. The importance of using appropriate resources at any level of education is well understood but here my focus is on primary and elementary level of education.

In primary grades, curricular subjects of Language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies (later

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Science and Social Science from Grade VI onwards) form the part of curricular subjects. Through Environmental Studies an integrated perspective is aimed to be developed in the learners and it is based on Science, Social Science and Environmental Education (Syllabus for classes at the elementary level, NCERT, 2006, p. 90). This integrated perspective cannot be developed until children learn the concepts with the help of different kinds of resources and are actively involved in their own learning. It's not just 'learning' Environmental Studies but 'doing' it. Thus, the use of appropriate resources is essential if one is to learn from one's own activities. Resources can be of several kinds. To involve the learners in a subject like Environmental Studies, the teacher has to make use of lots of age appropriate, contextual and relevant resources. It really requires imagination, efforts and willingness on the part of the teachers to reach out and use different kinds of resources in teaching-learning. Additionally, a teacher must also make efforts to use meaningful substitutes for the resources which are required but not available.

The need of using concrete material and hands-on experiences at primary and elementary levels of schooling is inherent in the fact that children learn best when all their senses are involved in learning. "When children interact with things in their environment in a scientific manner, it is through using process skills; handling, manipulating,

observing, questioning, interpreting, etc. The more they develop these skills, the more they can learn through their own activity and come to a real understanding of how the physical and biological parts of the world around them work" (Harlen and Elstgeest, 2000, p. 45). Thus, involving learners in an interaction with different resources can help them develop process skills which are an essential part of teaching-learning of Environmental Studies.

Sharp et al. (2012) explain different kinds of practical work that can take place while teaching-learning. It can be:

- A guided illustrative activity.
- An investigative activity including planning and carrying out scientific inquiry.
- The observation of a particular phenomenon.
- An activity to develop a particular skill.

Similarly, such different kinds of practical activities can be included in the pedagogy of environmental studies and a teacher can think of using different resources to carry these activities. The suggestive syllabus given by NCERT for the elementary classes (2006) also enlists useful resources that can be used while teaching concepts in different subjects. In environmental studies, resources such as child's daily life experience, observation of the surroundings, folk stories and folk toys are recommended along with the use of newspaper

clippings, pictures, photographs, films and relevant story books. Surveying and collection of information as well as archaeological and historical accounts are also labelled as resources.

With the coming of smart boards and online knowledge boom, everything is available almost ready-made and in an instant. However, understanding the contextual meaning of learning and attempting to know the global as well as the local, it is more important to make the learning organic and lively rather than making it just outcome-driven and same for all kinds of learners. This means the teacher has to reach out to others in her institution, surroundings and dig out whatever she thinks can add to the learning experience of her learners.

### **Suggestive Measures on How to Locate and Use Resources**

Learning to use different resources in pedagogy is an organic process and each teacher may have her own journey and experiences towards emerging as a resource-rich teacher. However, following are some of the suggestions that can be helpful in understanding how to avail and use resources in the pedagogy of Environmental Science.

- An important exercise of area mapping could be very beneficial in ensuring optimum use of easily available resources near the school. Teachers in particular must be aware of the locales and surroundings of their school. For this, teachers in group can gather information about places of interest

near the school, local flora and fauna and socio-cultural conditions in the area. This will help the teachers to make the curriculum and its transaction more contextual and at the same time, learners will learn to relate in a better manner with their immediate surroundings.

The author recalls one of her experiences while teaching in a school when one teacher's chance discovery of a lake in the close vicinity of the school became a great learning resource for all other teachers and learners. Learners collected the oral history about the lake by talking to the locals, learnt about flora and fauna near the water body and found out the possible factors of contamination of the lake.

- Human resources are of a great importance for any classroom. It means involving the people other than the teacher in the learning process of the child. The staff that works in the school; the gardener, nurse, supervisor, sweeper and guards can all offer experiences to the children to further their learning. Parents and grandparents of children can also be great resources in case the teacher knows fairly well about their professions and skills. Children learn real life lessons by interacting with them. So, this experience can be included in the teaching-learning whenever there is an opportunity to do so. When we talk about attitudinal change, such experiences go a long way in initiating a love for learning in the child and at the

same time make his/her learning real and contextual.

While working on the theme of mapping in Class V, the father of a child who was working as a Google employee for Google Maps, was invited to interact with the students about his work and about maps in general. Real life conversations emanate from experiences of this kind as students pose very interesting questions. On another occasion, while working on the theme of 'waste management', learners interacted with the sweeper and garbage collector of the school, they were thrilled to know the journey of the waste from their classroom to the landfill.

- There are numerous websites that give suggestions about use of different kinds of resources and give grass roots level ideas worth trying with the learners. With the upsurge of online world, one can make very good use of the learning tools that these webpages offer. Websites that offer video and audio clippings, activity ideas and enlist different places of interest for children should surely be looked into. At the end, it is a teacher who has to sift through these resources and see what works best for her learners.

On numerous occasions, videos downloaded from Youtube have added to the overall learning of the concept. Hands-on experiences and direct observation of the phenomenon cannot of course be replaced by showcasing of videos but at times videos prove

to be very useful. While teaching the concept of 'Natural Calamities' in Class V, real life videos shot at the time of Tsunami that hit India on 26 December 2004 gave the learners a very different feel of the entire situation and they could relate with the havoc created by it. Used as prompts, these videos made the learners raise important safety issues. They could understand the gravity of the calamity after watching the video clippings.

- Networking with your immediate colleagues and from other nearby schools proves very useful. A teacher who has tried something wonderful with her learners has lot to share with other teachers about the idea. This way good ideas and practices spread and reach out to many.

The timely interactive meetings and reflective sessions helped me a lot as a teacher. There was a great deal to learn from each other. Our success stories and our pitfalls; all taught us something valuable. We worked not only in close collaboration with each other in our school but also interacted with the other teachers teaching in different branches of the school through a web portal.

- Make ample use of the outdoors and spend time with your learners exploring the surroundings. "Don't forget the one of the best, and certainly the biggest, resource is outdoors" (Sharp et al., 2012, p. 90).

While teaching the theme of 'insects' in Class IV, the outdoors guided us tremendously. We moved beyond the usual examples of insects and gave the learners an opportunity to see the life of insects out there in the nature. On the basis of their observation of different insects and their body parts, they deduced the physical characteristics of the insects like they have three pairs of legs, one pair of antennae and their body is divided into three parts. On another occasion, the survey conducted in the nearby localities of the school made the children realise the hardships of people due to shortage of water. We believed, experiences of this kind would go a long way in sensitising our learners about environmental issues.

- Teachers can together create a small resource in the school wherein they can collect material and literature which is useful for the learners. Such resources can come in handy at the time of need and can engage the learners well in the classroom. Resources can not only be concrete articles but stories, poems, news articles, case studies, photographs, videos clippings and riddles can all be counted as resources.

Collecting and maintaining resources was something that helped us a lot. We made children our partners in that exercise. Whenever we got to know something that we

thought would be interesting to know and explore, we shared it with others. Cocoon of silkworms, abandoned nests of weaver bird, tribal jewellery all adorned our classes at some point of time. These all prove to be great stimulus for learning.

- The last but nonetheless important point is to realise that children can be excellent resources for each other. So, it is important to encourage them to share their experiences and voice their opinions. Dalgety (1983) put it up very well when she says, "Although non-human resources are easier to obtain at short notice, the crucial role of human interaction must be acknowledged. Things can't by themselves teach values" (p. 135).

Dialoguing was always considered important and children almost always raised crucial questions. While interacting with some MCD officials in their office about the cleanliness of the city, the children did not hesitate to ask why some of the walls of their own office looked so dirty with beetle-nut stains and why they do not keep their office clean if they claim to keep the entire city clean.

Hence, it is important to realise that carefully chosen resources can make learning fun and engaging. All that we as teachers need to do is to start relating with our own surroundings and environment in a larger sense. Schools are not closed

structures, there is a need to reach out to the community and nearby locales in order to make learning holistic and meaningful for the child.

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