

A Small Step Towards Better Education

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It was a regular day at school. As a teacher, I loved my morning classes. As usual, I went to my class. The children of Class I were waiting for me. As soon as I enter the class, their broad smile usually lights up my day. After the regular wishes and pleasantries, I began my class. I took up a small poem. I had planned a tune for reciting the poem in the class. The students enjoyed the tune. Children usually love animals and stories and poems related to animals. In this poem, many animals and birds were mentioned. This excited the kids too!

As an extended activity, the students were asked to imitate the animals in this poem. It was then that one child asked a question. He asked me what a Seal was. Another child was quick to add, "What is a Seagull?" These questions set me into a thinking mode. It was then that I realised that, the children were enjoying the rhyme and rhythm of the poem, no doubt about that. But did they understand the poem? Were they

able to relate this poem to their lives? Do all of them recognise the animals (like seals, seagulls, eels, fleas and whales) mentioned in the poem?

The child usually connects the newly acquired knowledge in the classroom to the knowledge they already possess off the classroom. In this case, they were not able to relate as few of the animals mentioned in the poem were not from their familiar environment. What is the purpose then of inclusion of this sort of content in the textbooks, I wondered! This poem would be very meaningful to a child in Europe or America, perhaps.

The same day, I put together the textbooks of classes one to five on my table and sat for a critical examination of the books. I turned the pages and looked at the lessons and tasks with a new perspective. I began observing the illustrations that supported the content. On one hand I thought few of the lessons were very good with a message to the young learner. They

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had content that depicted the Indian family values like sharing and caring.

They even had content that gave a message of conservation of nature around us, like the plants and animals. They had the underling message of being happy. It is good that folk tales and stories from North-East corner of our country too are included. Few lessons also had their main concepts (like EVS concepts) woven around a story, which is an effective way of presentation.

On the other hand, I also felt few were hollow. They had a negative ending and no message at all. In a few lessons, the situation was not familiar to the child. Things like snow, fir trees, etc are not known to a child. The child has to imagine such things as there is no first-hand experience. A few illustrations were apt and relatable. But I found that illustrations in a few books were not clear (graphically blurred), not realistic (artificially put together) and that they do not give a true picture to the child.

After a thorough study of the content of various textbooks, I realised that there is a dire need to include "*Bharatiya Content*" in our books. The animals, pictures and many trees too which were mentioned in the lessons or poems were not from our country (or the immediate environment of the children). As a result of this, the children were not able to connect with the lesson or poem. This, I found to be one of the root causes that creates the unrelatability of our textbooks.

This point may be elaborated as: when a flower is mentioned in any lesson or task, the most commonly mentioned one seems to be the rose flower. Rose is now-a-days found everywhere across India, no doubt. But is it the only flower that deserves mention in the books? Where have our hibiscus flowers, jasmines, lotuses and marigolds gone? The apple seems to be the favourite fruit of the writers and our jackfruit, custard apple and guava seem to be lost!

I felt a strong need to give children "India-centric content". With all such thoughts in my head, I firmly resolved to continue teaching, making a conscious effort however, to supplement my teaching, substituting/supplementing the content with additional information for the benefit of my young learners.

When I read the draft National Education Policy 2019, I saw my thoughts being mirrored in it. As rightly mentioned in the draft of the National Education Policy, all the teaching-learning materials must be India-centric. All of us (citizens of our country) must take the collective responsibility of helping the younger generation know about our country, its flora and fauna, the festivals and traditions, and the beauty of our motherland. I do hope this suggestion in the draft is considered and it reflects in the teaching-learning materials developed henceforth.