

Texts and Contexts— Into Pedagogy of Social Sciences in Primary Classes

Tripti Bassi*

Abstract

Social Sciences occupy unique significance in the disciplinary domain of school knowledge. They are integral for building understanding of social realities and meanings. In the form of Social Studies, they enrich school learning by introducing children to concepts related to the self, neighbourhood and society, among others. This paper is based on content analysis of three textbooks of Social Studies introduced by the State Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi, in 2004, following a distinct approach by introducing children to concepts in a sequential and developmental manner through Class III textbook 'My Delhi' (Meri Dilli), Class IV textbook 'Our India' (Hamara Bharat), and 'Our World' (Hamari Duniya). According to the National Curriculum Framework 2005, Class III onwards Environmental Studies should be introduced for building cognitive capabilities. Discussions related to natural and social environments have to be presented to the learners in an integrated and cohesive manner. However, the successful exercise of underlining the social and cultural aspects related to the self and the world around is vividly brought through these textbooks, and offers an appreciative way by its innovative and distinct approach to situate Social Sciences within the discourse of school knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Social Sciences are integral for developing a sound understanding of the self and society playing significant

roles in the initial years of childhood when young learners are grappling with social phenomena around them and their nuances. These help children to develop the potential for keen

* Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi

observation and learning and gradually become skillful observers of socio-cultural practices and traditions. The threads of Social Sciences also weave the tapestry of social relationships that are both formal and informal in nature. Social Sciences help in development of attitude, behaviour and personality of children by inculcating the spirit of critical inquiry among learners. From skillful observation come comprehension and analysis. Social Sciences ensure overall growth of the child's potential in comprehending social situations and analysing cultural practices. These build schemas which are useful in social contexts as well as interpersonal relationships. However, it is ironical that students mostly find Social Sciences to be uninteresting as a discipline and also many a times question its relevance. One reason could be that a few parents pursue Social Sciences in their professional lives being employed in sectors that are skill-based. Social Sciences therefore need to be transacted in an innovative manner to nurture inquisitive skills so that they instill curiosity and interest among young learners to understand and explore, rather than just be a subject of rote memorisation for passing examinations.

THE CONTEXT

This paper seeks to analyse the Social Studies textbooks of Delhi for Classes III to V to critically look at how they locate disciplinary discourse within local milieu. Social Science curriculum is transacted through syllabus and

textbooks. Textbooks serve as source of content knowledge that students are expected to be acquainted with. When a child goes to school, she begins learning by acquainting herself with her body (My Body and Five senses) and her immediate needs. The next step in learning is to focus on the family and its role in knitting the fabric of society. Later, the 'family tree' is introduced as a concept that depicts all the family members across generations, along with description of their relationship with one another. Early efforts to draw the family tree and highlight relationships enable them conceptually to build linkages with their network of associations. Next, students are acquainted with the idea of 'neighbourhood'. They realise how we exist in consonance with people around us. Exchange of ideas and practices allows students to develop the quality of empathy which is integral to human values. Meanwhile we need to note that as prescribed by the National Curriculum Framework 2005, the Environmental Studies for Classes I and II are taught in a flexible manner whereby concepts are taken up by the teacher adhering to the ideal of spiral curriculum. The same concepts are transacted in progression by increasing their level of complexity wherein students keep developing a better understanding of the concepts and their meanings in a gradual and progressive manner.

Curriculum, syllabus and textbooks serve a shared purpose of bringing concepts to learners in

an organised and comprehensive manner across the stages. Social Sciences are multifarious in nature, touching all aspects of our lives. They constitute disciplines of History, Geography, Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology. Initially, students are introduced to themes in a structured way. Only later the disciplines are presented in the middle stages, when students are supposed to have developed a more mature vision of social realities. As focused learners of each discipline, students manage to develop a gamut of knowledge associated with each discipline and acquire the techniques used for strengthening the nature and scope of each subject. These textbooks are critically examined in respect to providing insights into social, cultural, political and economic milieu of Delhi, India and the World in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs content analysis in the backdrop of theoretical framework as a method to examine and discuss Social Studies textbooks. Qualitative content analysis comprises of 'strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination, replication, inference and verification of the contents of written data'. Thus, attention is paid to the text and its meanings in order to capture holistic understanding of the written and unwritten but intended suggestive aspects (Cohen, Manion & Morrison

2018, 674). The paper describes and discusses the content of these three textbooks introduced consecutively to the learners of primary classes in Municipal Corporation of Delhi schools.

The paper makes use of the experiences of student-teachers who have transacted content from Class III textbook to the learners. The qualitative data was gathered through interaction and classroom discussions. The purpose was to gain a field view of the content transaction. The paper therefore includes briefly what they liked about the content and what they found was challenging in the course of the teaching-learning process from the viewpoint of the teacher. Overall, the paper uses content analysis, experiences of student-teachers of the Elementary Teacher Education Programme (B.El. Ed College) of University of Delhi to see in praxis the discourse around the texts, and how it builds their context to examine the associated meanings and their interpretation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Studies

At the Elementary Stage, the Social Sciences have been traditionally introduced to students in the form of 'Social Studies'. The main objective of Social Studies is to acquaint the young learners with the social world in an organised manner (Ellis, 1995, 2). It is a cohesive and collective study of

social subjects with a view to develop holistic knowledge and understanding. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), Social Studies is “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities that enhance civic competence... as a discipline it enables students to develop the capability to make rational decisions for the public good being citizens of a culturally diverse and democratic society in a cohesive world” (Ellis 1995, 3).

Widening Horizons

Students as young learners are expected to start from the local and then progress to the global understanding of different phenomena. Social Studies usually adopts a widening horizon or expanding environments-curriculum approach whereby the instruction begins from simple to the complex, from what is familiar to that which is remote, actually from the known to the unknown. This means that students of kindergarten and first standard begin by reading about self-awareness and families because these themes are known, familiar and relevant to the immediate environment of young children. Gradually, their horizon widens to include neighbourhoods, communities, cities, regions, nations and the western and eastern hemispheres. These entities appear as concepts and understanding tools as their learning progresses. Thus, this kind of progression in the study of people from the self to the world is referred to as widening horizons approach (Ellis 1995, 7).

Spiral Curriculum

The idea of spiral curriculum is integrated with the concept of widening horizons. The concepts and ideas with learning begin to reappear in later stages as learning progresses, but with higher forms of differentiation this can be seen as spiralling curriculum. The spiral curriculum is focused upon those aspects through which ‘reinforcement of knowledge and ideas, concepts and skill development, and transfer of learning’ is expected to actualise. Thus, self-awareness and family studies that find space in the early grades are revisited again at the later stages. These concepts which are presented in a simple manner are again presented with higher levels of analysis and discussion. Moreover, through the spiral curriculum we are able to introduce themes to learners which were considered to be too complex to be presented early. Therefore, the widening horizons and spiral curriculum work in consonance in imparting a logical and rational understanding of the Social Sciences (Ellis 1995, 8). It is also the case with natural sciences. As learning grows in stages, the concepts and subjects reappear with higher levels of information and complexities.

Inquiry Learning

Inquiry is the basis of all knowledge acquirement. For the child, it is the most natural way to know the things based on curiosity. In Social Sciences, it is established as a valid method of

research too. Inquiry is “a process in which we pose questions about human behaviour and attempt to answer those questions by making inferences about our data” (Ellis 1995, 159). It involves ability to pose questions and reach indepth analysis to texts. Such an approach of inquiry learning is also intricately related to the idea of spiral curriculum. Here, students apply Social Science methods or processes to explore ideas and the connection between ideas by themselves. Such transaction ensure student-directed efforts being used for investigation. This approach allows students to develop a conducive attitude towards learning and they are also able to retain this knowledge for a longer duration of time (Ellis 1995, 10).

THROUGH THE TEXTBOOKS

Social Studies Textbooks

The Social Studies textbooks developed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Delhi in 2004 paved the way for the transaction of Social Sciences in an effective manner. In the preface, the Education Director highlights how Delhi like other States required textbooks which would reflect both

cultural and social dimensions of the city and its neighbourhood effectively. This kind of content is crucial at the elementary stage of education (Classes I-VIII) since it assists in construction of the fundamental value systems and helps in building perspectives for the future.

Kumar (2004) underlines that since Delhi is the Capital of India, the students should be exposed to content that relates to National aims. Students should be briefed about the ethos of Delhi and its immediate surroundings. Moreover, National Policy on Education (1986) states that child-centred content should be developed. Yashpal Committee (1993) also underlines that content should be presented in cohesive and simple manner ensuring reduced information-load but broadening the understanding. The SCERT textbooks uphold the aims and objectives of the National Policy on Education (1986) in synchronising learning goals with the aims of education. Teachers were deputed with the task of transacting textbooks in an effective manner. Focus was laid on vulnerable groups like girls while finalising drafts of these textbooks.

The Social Studies textbook of Class III, *Meri Dilli* has concepts and processes related to History, Geography and Political Science which have been introduced with clarity to build a sound theoretical framework. For instance, the first section— ‘Our City’ includes chapters on ‘Map of Delhi’, ‘History of Delhi’, ‘Children’s



Delhi', 'Means of Transport in Delhi', 'Journey', 'Seasons', 'Festivals', 'Mountain and River'. The second section is on 'Capital of Delhi'-New Delhi', 'President's House', 'Picnic at India Gate', 'Walk through Connaught Place', 'Rajghat: Remembering Gandhi', 'Places of Worship', 'Culture: Museum'. The final section is on 'Story of Delhi' which includes 'Qutab Minar', 'Tughlakabad', 'Hazrat Nizamuddin', 'Humayun's Tomb', 'Shahjahanabad', 'Walk through Chandni Chowk', 'Delhi Gate', 'Jantar Mantar', 'Communication System' and 'Delhi Government' in a story-telling manner.

Hamara Bharat (Our India)

Marking the journey from the familiar to the broader zone, the subsequent textbook of Class IV, *Hamara Bharat* marks the shift from Delhi to the rest of India. Thus, the themes that are highlighted include rivers and plains of India, deserts of India, mountains of India, plateaus of India, sea shores, administration in India, neighbouring countries, and finally the map of the World. Alongside, seasons and festivals have again been discussed with an enhanced level of complexity. A chapter on 'play' focuses on various kinds of indoor and outdoor play as well as rules and methods of playing these sports and games. The chapters in this textbook also have exercises to enable teachers to assess students and address their concerns. Broadly, Geography related themes are emphasised upon and students are encouraged to develop mapping skills. The content

of the textbook, being interactive, highlights expression of children and are essentially child-centred.

Hamari Duniya (Our World)

The final series of this set, *Hamari Duniya* referred to as 'Our World' underlines the need to be acquainted with global knowledge. It believes in 'one World, one Planet'. The content is introduced in a lively manner through conversation between children in most of the chapters. It starts to familiarise students with continents and oceans of the World. Students are encouraged to indicate the same on map of the World and enhance their mapping skills. The chapter on 'The Earth: Then and Now' brings forth the history of the Earth to the students in a succulent manner. Use of coloured photographs and maps enables abstract thinking to formalise into concrete reality. Special additions like boxes on interesting facts about continents generate curiosity among learners. Moreover, hands-on activity for students provides them enough scope to explore and experiment. The concepts of 'earth, globe and map are clarified through content and related applications. Students are expected to be able to locate places with the help of latitudes and longitudes. Use of atlas definitely assists in cementing such ideas in a cohesive manner.

Certain concepts considered to be of the higher order like 'climate' are introduced in a contextual manner and the next chapter is on 'grasslands'. Thus, the teacher can build linkages between these two themes and help students understand how climate

affects vegetation in an important manner. Grasslands have also been presented to bring diversity of flora and fauna to young learners. Deserts of the World are also discussed and students build upon their previous learning of this idea gained in the previous class. Oceans such as water bodies are linked integrally to the themes discussed already. Life on earth addresses environment concerns and issues that are significant for sustenance in the long run. The chapter on the beginning of Civilisation discusses primitive civilisations like Sumerian Civilisation, Egyptian Civilisation, Harappan Civilisation and Chinese Civilisation that create a ground for the introduction of History as a discipline to the students in the next class. Such back and forth progression accelerates the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge in a meaningful manner. Means of communication have been discussed helping children develop higher cognitive abilities. Invention of paper and its printing marks a section that assists students in contextualising concepts based on their experiences. A chapter on '*Sanket Yantra*' (signal device) could have been compressed to transact contemporary relevant technological knowledge to the young learners. Means of transport focuses on waterways, airways and railways helping students place their real life experiences in relation to knowledge gained. Thus, the last textbook in the series capacitates learners in building theoretical knowledge specifically related to the disciplines of Geography and History.

PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE: EXPERIENCES

The experiences of a few student-teachers who taught Social Studies would be worth looking at. The transaction of the textbook on Delhi involved many challenges since the chapters had only texts and assessment exercises were missing. Not only students but also teachers are accustomed to assessment that goes alongside the chapters in the form of exercises. The student-teachers, during their internship, tried to address this gap by developing their own forms of assessment and assist students in acquiring the requisite social science skills of inquiry learning and discovery method. To illustrate, in order to underline the significance of 'culture', one student-teacher Disha (name changed) did clay-modelling activity whereby she helped students develop clay models of artefacts and displayed them in the class museum. The students became very fond of their 'class museum' and continued to add various objects and in the process, also developed a sense of belongingness to their class as a space besides developing a sense of history. Story telling as a method, experience as a resource, use of child-centred articles from magazines as supplementary text served as vital tools in building ideas and thought. The student-teachers themselves developed curiosity about Delhi's rich cultural heritage and started reading additional books on the history of Delhi which strengthened their own conceptual base (classroom discussions).

CONCLUSION

Innovations, inventions and discoveries in the content and its transaction are vital for strengthening of disciplinary discourse and its fusion and diffusion among learners. Teachers require textbooks as medium to transact themes that the syllabus expects them to do. The aims of the Social Science curriculum as discussed in the Position Paper of Social Sciences in the National Curriculum Framework (2005) are to allow learners to appreciate diversity and heterogeneity that exists around them. Similarly, they are expected to nurture curiosity and interest about Social Science phenomena which can be made possible through the

use of scientific method in forming a conceptual base of the Social Science teachers. Social Sciences are objective but at the same time, they allow subjective expressions to seep in through individual experiences. Social realities can only be transformed into theoretical categories through effective transaction of the Social Sciences. Education for Peace will also be possible through this educational endeavour in a smooth and effortless manner. Thus, we need Social Science teachers who metamorphosise learners from caterpillars to butterflies of various hues and imaginations by taking them on a journey of self-discovery and exploration.

REFERENCES

- COHEN, L., L. MANION AND K. MORRISON. 2018. *Research Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge.
- ELLIS, ARTHUR K. 1995. *Teaching and Learning Elementary Social Studies*. Sixth Edition. Seattle Pacific University.
- NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK. 2005. *Position Paper on the Social Sciences*. NCERT. New Delhi.
- GOVERNMENT OF INDIA. 1993. *Yashpal Committee Report: Learning Without Burden*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi.
- GOVERNMENT OF INDIA. 2020. *National Education Policy*. Ministry of Human Resource Development. New Delhi.
- GOVERNMENT OF INDIA. 1986. *National Policy on Education*. Ministry of Human Resource Development. New Delhi.
- SCERT. 2004. *Meri Dilli (My Delhi)*. *Samajik Adhyayan (Social Studies)*, Class 3. State Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi Textbook Bureau, Delhi Directorate, New Delhi.
- . 2004. *Hamara Bharat (Our India)*. *Samajik Adhyayan (Social Studies)*, Class 4. State Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi Textbook Bureau, Delhi Directorate, New Delhi.
- . 2004. *Hamari Duniya (Our World)*. *Samajik Adhyayan (Social Studies)*, Class 5. State Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi Textbook Bureau, Delhi Directorate, New Delhi.