

## EDITORIAL

### **Guidebooks at the Primary Stage!**

The recent *National Curriculum Framework-2005* places the child at the centre stage and recommends a pedagogical shift from teacher centred to learner centred. To translate this vision of NCF-2005 into practice, NCERT developed child centred textbooks. NCERT textbooks are interactive and provide children opportunities to ask questions; to think; to do activities and arrive at their own conclusions. To translate this vision of NCF-2005 in to practice, teachers need to create a child centred classroom, where each child is actively engaged in learning. The challenging task for teachers is to design a variety of learning experiences/situations to meet the needs of diverse learners. A flexible curriculum requires teachers to discuss knowledge and ideas that are relevant for children even though these are not part of textbooks. For example, if children want to know and understand about Malaria and Dengue in the rainy season of July-August, then teacher must discuss these in class, even if these are not part of the textbook. Children should be able to relate school knowledge to their everyday life experiences. Let children bring knowledge that they have constructed outside (home and neighbourhood) to school and negotiate this knowledge with teachers and peers.

In spite of child centred textbooks, the teaching in schools remains teacher centred. The teacher centred practices are supplemented by guidebooks. The guidebooks translate curriculum into questions and answers. Students copy questions and answers from guidebooks in the notebooks. The learning process reduces to copying without understanding. Students then memorise these questions and answers, to pass the examinations. Use of guidebooks as learning resource by students and teachers promotes rote learning, thus distorting the aims of education.

NCERT textbooks require students to discuss, to ask questions, to narrate their experiences, to listen to others' experiences and construct their own knowledge. The questions raised in textbooks are related to students' everyday life experiences and each question can have several answers. Textbooks encourage students to solve problems in their own way, thus appreciating that a problem can be solved in many different ways. Private publishers have developed guidebooks for NCERT textbooks also. These guidebooks have in-text and practice questions of the textbooks with answers. For primary classes, there is one guidebook that has questions and answers for all the subjects – Hindi, English, Mathematics and Environmental Studies.

Visit to schools in different states reveals that guidebooks are used in schools by students and teachers both. Students copy questions and answers from guidebooks in their notebooks. Teachers also use guidebooks as support

material. Some teachers copy questions and answers from guidebooks on the blackboard. Use of guidebooks has adverse effect on students' learning. For example, a student of Class V was copying following questions and answers from the guidebook.

Q. Have you ever been to a hill station?

Ans. Yes, I went to Himachal Pradesh during summer vacations.

Q. Did you climb on the hill? How many kilometres?

Ans. I climbed five kilometres.

This was recess time, I asked this student, "have you been to Himachal Pradesh?" She said, 'no'. I asked her how much 5 km is, she pointed to a nearby shop, which is less than one km. I further asked her about her learning processes. She said all students copy questions and answers from guidebooks and memorise. Teacher marks portions to be copied from the guidebooks. Teachers do not engage children in activities, discussions and group work.

When students are not engaged in reading activities, how will they comprehend the text and enjoy reading the textbooks. Similarly, Mathematics textbooks have large number of activities such as measuring volume of textbooks, books, geometry box, lunch box, etc., measuring area and perimeter of table, room and so on. Students make devices to measure 'angle'. Students also make paper aeroplane, boat, and other toys and measure angles formed. Students learn to recognise patterns and draw generalisations from patterns. Each chapter has large number of activities, which help children in developing concepts and children enjoy learning. If students are not doing all these activities and are simply copying and memorising questions and answers, the objectives of learning mathematics cannot be achieved. This also is a reason for low learning achievement in primary classes.

Besides encouraging rote learning, guidebooks put additional financial burden on parents. With burden of guidebooks and private tuitions, education is not free for these children. The cost of a guidebook varies from ₹160 to 200, more than the cost of five NCERT textbooks. A child spends about ₹ 200-300 per month on private tuitions. Private tutors also use guidebooks as learning resource. Increasing use of guidebooks and private tuitions at primary stage suggests that teacher efforts are inadequate and students require extra tuition from private teacher and help from guidebooks.

Teachers need to reflect upon these practices and discourage the use of guidebooks in schools. Teachers not only have to cover the syllabus, they must facilitate children in achieving the objectives of learning and aims of schooling.

—Academic Editor