Social Sciences Teaching and Learning

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How is History Done?

A Model as 'Ready Reckoner'?

Anil Sethi

My aim in this piece is to introduce History and Education professionals, including school and college teachers, to a model that explains how History is done. By 'done' I mean how it is researched, constructed (in and through monographs, learned articles, textbooks and other materials), and also how it is taught and learnt, rather how we ought to undertake all these activities. A model is an intellectual template that 'simplifies reality in order to emphasise the recurrent, the general and the typical.'

Identifying or formulating interesting problems for analysis will immediately bring to our work both clarity and sophistication.

I shall, therefore, present how histories are written, what is it that historians usually do, and how History as a discipline ought to be taught and learnt. By definition, a model should be *generally* applicable, hence mine will apply to the creation and teaching of *any* history, whatever its time-period, locale or theme. Furthermore, this model will also implicitly underscore the idea that history pedagogy should be closely related to the historian's craft.

I developed this model for the purposes of teaching a course on 'History and Social Science Education' at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. My students in that course came from a wide range of social backgrounds and disciplines. How was I to explain the fundamentals of the best history-writing

and history pedagogy to this heterogenous group of dentists, biologists, mathematicians, engineers, geographers, sociologists, literary critics and the like? I had to devise content and pedagogy that ought to go to the heart of the matter, be lucid yet sophisticated, and use not an inordinate amount of time. This model was my answer. It consists of a series of elements or steps; albeit, these do not occur in a scholar's or teacher's work in any linear fashion. These elements constitute the following.

1. Problem(s) for Analysis.
2. Explanation: Arguments and Narrative. How do arguments and narratives fold into each other?
3. The facts of the case.
4. Evidence and sources.
5. Perspective:
   a. Perspective and prejudice; prejudiced perspectives.
   b. Interpretations from one angle of vision, from a given vantage-point; are all perspectives partial?
   c. Multi-vocality or heteroglossia. Many different voices: In the evidence itself; at the level of the protagonists; among scholars, that is, among historians/ social scientists. Synthesize perspectives wherever possible.
6. Concepts and categories.

Problems for Analysis

In all disciplines researchers work with analytical questions. What precisely is being investigated or analysed? In my experience, it is useful to teach and study in a similar manner, to clearly signpost the problem for analysis, something rarely done by history
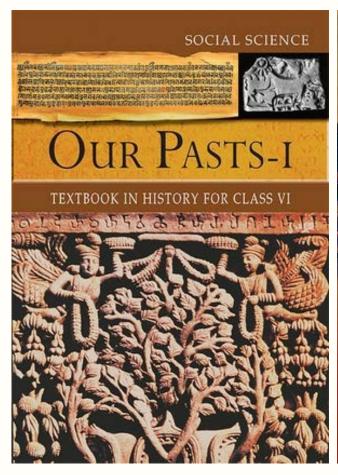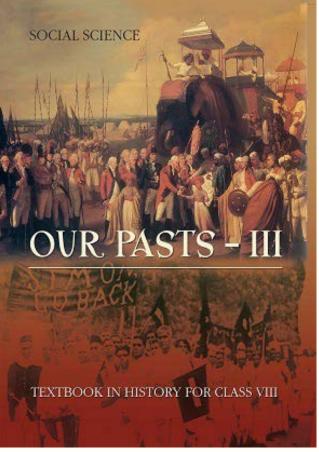
teachers and students. Identifying or formulating interesting problems for analysis will immediately bring to our work both clarity and sophistication.

If the chosen problem is weighty enough, it will inspire us to discover or create rich explanations for the given phenomenon, explanations that seek to grasp the interplay of a large number of factors. In order to explain this point, let me offer the following as random illustrations of some engrossing problems for analysis from Indian history.

1. All of us know that, from 1919-20 onwards, the anti-colonial Indian national movement gradually became an *all-India mass movement*. Why did this happen from 1919-20 onwards, why not earlier or later? (In some sense, this is a quintessential history question, its generic form being: why do things happen, when in fact they happen?)

2. How and when did Sikhism crystalize into a separate faith, as a religion in its own right?

3. Why did Buddhism have a meteoric rise and fall in India?

4. Despite the recommendations of the National Education Commission of 1964-66 (the so-called Kothari Commission), that a common public education system be introduced in the country, this never happened. Why?

5. How did social class, caste, religious identity, and patriarchy inter-penetrate in different time-periods and locations to produce groups suffering from what has been called compounded disadvantage? (This is a vast question. Keeping the historical contexts in focus, it will have to be broken up into several specific questions.)

NCERT School Textbooks for History

Explanations, Evidence and Facts

Whatever be the answers to these questions, the explanations will inevitably consist of a series of arguments or narratives. From time to time, the idea of merely narrativizing events or of telling stories has been attacked and scholars have spoken about the need to discover underlying structures. Even so, narrative, in a fairly strong sense of that term, has made several comebacks in the discipline.

In the best histories, reasoning in the form of argumentation has usually come interfused with storytelling and description. But what are the historian's arguments and narratives based on? Like the journalist and the lawyer, the historian must deal with the 'facts of the case' and these are culled from evidence, which in turn is gathered from a range of sources. Historians tend to distinguish between 'primary' and 'secondary' sources, the former being defined as those originating from the time-period of the events under investigation. It goes without saying that a critical scrutiny of the facts, evidence and sources must always be carried out.

Much can be said about 'facts', 'evidence' and 'sources'. But owing to space constraints, I confine myself here to a few basic remarks about the training historians might receive in interpreting their evidence. All researchers must ask, how exactly a given body of evidence was created. Who created it? What exactly was created? How, when, where, why?

Remember Rudyard Kipling's 'six honest serving men?' ["I Keep Six Honest Serving Men, (They taught me all I knew) ..."] Kipling's seventh 'slave' may well have been 'for whom'; that is, for whom was the evidence created? Did the recorder produce the document for personal use, for one or more individuals or for a large readership? Is it first-hand evidence or hearsay? Was it meant to be used privately or publicly? Does it offer information or an argument or a perspective?

In short, the historian is trained to raise a thousand questions regarding the many different formations of Kipling's 'honest serving men' – permutations, if you like - and it is these questions that help us assess the evidence for its veracity.

In the best histories, reasoning in the form of argumentation has usually come interfused with storytelling and description.

It shall take many words to delve deeper into the question of evidence or write about the role of facts in historical construction. We would have to leave that for another occasion.

The Problem of Perspective

Arguments are formed through a critical reading of the available sources, by asking questions of them, and by stringing evidence, facts and reasoning together. The power of arguments rests on how persuasively this is done. But surely no argument or story is without perspective. Even evidence and facts are marshalled from a certain perspective.

In fact, perspective *inheres* in every fact or piece of evidence. Likewise, evidence and fact may be *seen* from different perspectives, from different angles of vision. Allow me to dwell at some length on the vexatious issue of perspective, and its role in historical (and social-scientific) constructions.

First, I wish to emphasise that not all perspectives are prejudiced. There is a difference between prejudice (or bias) on the one hand and perspective on the other. On the matter of prejudice, I can do no better than quote Bernard Lewis (*History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*, New York, Touchstone, 1975, p. 54):

The essential and distinctive feature of scholarly research is, or should be, that it is not directed to pre-determined results. The historian does not set out to prove a thesis, or select material to establish some point, but follows the evidence where it leads. No human being is free from human failings, among them loyalties and prejudices which may colour his perception and presentation of history. The essence of *the critical scholarly historian* [emphasis mine] is that he is aware of this fact, and instead of indulging his prejudices seeks to identify and correct them.

Here Lewis defines prejudice for us and suggests how professionals might engage with it. While some perspectives may be prejudiced, not all are. A perspective is an angle of vision, a vantage point. Many vantage points may just be different from each other rather than being prejudiced.

Take, for instance, the issue of the Partition of British India. In writing comprehensively about this topic, so many perspectives have to be kept in mind: of the major political parties and nations of course, but also of people of different backgrounds – of the young man who lay hidden among the dead before he could run for his life from Jammu to Sialkot; of the woman performing back-breaking road repairs on a highway in eastern India; of the trader who sold wheat at whole-sale prices in the retail market, eking out a living by making a few paise by selling the gunny bags in which the wheat came; of the women who were persuaded by the menfolk in their families to 'protect' 'community honour' by jumping into wells in order to commit mass suicide; and, of couples of mixed backgrounds who ran away from hospitals to god-forsaken trenches to give birth to their children.

So many stories, so many protagonists, so many voices. Do our accounts of 1947

and the names we use for it pay heed to all these voices? Was this really a 'Partition', a more or less agreed upon division of assets and territories; or was it a 'disturbance', 'tumult' and genocide? Or a civil war that raged for sixteen months? Why don't we call it, 'the creation of Pakistan?' Why didn't the historians' histories speak of Partition's untold brutality and violence until the mid-1990s? When did Partition begin and when did it end? So many questions! Varied ways of looking at a phenomenon yield different questions, let alone different answers.

A perspective is an angle of vision, a vantage point. Many vantage points may just be different from each other rather than being prejudiced.

This tells us that events and social processes, historical as well as contemporary, have multi-layered and overlapping histories. There just cannot be a single way of comprehending them. They may be amenable to different narratives, created from different pivots or vantage points. It is the duty of the historian to try to create a conversation between different perspectives, to capture conflicting voices.

Such an exercise would help reveal the pluralities of a given history, of the many different pasts that have informed our realities as they emerge from the tunnel of bygone ages into the present. That is why the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) chose to name its history textbooks for Classes 6, 7 and 8 - in current use - *Our Pasts*. The emphasis on the plural must not be ignored.

And that is why a leading historian of our times, Peter Burke urges his peers to interpret conflicts through a conflict of interpretations. This because history is

not something fixed, objective, based only on facts. In the early twentieth century, historians used to speak of the 'Voice of History', much as popular Mumbai film industry movies sometimes still do. Is there a 'Voice of History' and should uncovering this be the historian's ideal? Or are there many varied, even opposed voices in history? Shouldn't our ideal then be to grasp history's heteroglossia – that is, its varied and sometimes opposed voices?

Arguments are formed through a critical reading of the available sources, by asking questions of them, and by stringing evidence, facts and reasoning together. The power of arguments rests on how persuasively this is done.

It is the business of the historian or the teacher to look at all the angles of vision bearing upon a history (or social-scientific) problem, and to establish the extent to which these perspectives are grounded in evidence and fact. This will help us assess the validity of the arguments arising from each perspective. Finally, with respect to several cases, there may be scope to synthesize arguments and perspectives; this should be done wherever possible.

Concepts and Categories

Last but not the least, practioners in the Humanities and Social Sciences use and create a vast range of concepts and categories – for ordering reality, for distinguishing between phenomena, cognate or otherwise, for generating clarity. They ought to understand these concepts and categories correctly. How, for instance, can I argue with anybody about the merits or demerits of capitalism unless my interlocutor

and I arrive at a technically sound and mutually acceptable understanding of what is capitalism? How do I decide upon the character of the 1857 movement unless my fellow-debaters and I know the meanings of categories such as 'mutiny', 'rebellion', 'war of independence' or even 'revolution'?

It is cognate concepts that are the most confounding. Should 'patriotism' and 'nationalism', 'homeland' and 'nation' be distinguished from each other, and if so, how? Are 'frontier' and 'border' much the same thing? Wouldn't we feel muddled if we thought of the 'incidence of disease' as its 'prevalence'? Shouldn't we be conversant with the entire range of meanings of words like 'popular' and 'populist' before we speak of 'popular revolts' or 'popular leaders' or 'leaders not so popular but populist'? In other words, a sound grasp of the relevant concepts and categories becomes essential for the description, analysis and narrativization of history.

Take-away

The six elements of the model which I have outlined for you here inevitably characterize all history-writing and history-teaching. It would help to be actively aware of this. This model could be used to cross-check our work and reflect on it. These six elements are the fundamental building blocks of our endeavors.

I would go to the extent of saying that the *fundamental* building blocks here can only be just six – no less, no more. All other artefacts, ideas, factors that enter our historical (and social-scientific) constructions would have to be subsets of these basic elements. Consequently, they would be subsumed under one or more of these six.

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"Without Geography, You're Nowhere!"

Chandra Shekhar Balachandran

Introduction

Geography education in India continues to lag behind the many rapid changes in the country and the world. These include many very complex challenges including accelerated environmental changes, the rapid spread of diseases, widening socio-economic inequities, loss of cultural heritage that have sustained peoples for millennia, and a digital divide that still leaves the majority of people of the world unempowered and disempowered.

At the same time, the potency and power of technological innovations continues apace unlike ever before. These can help us address the above changes in innovative ways. Along with technological progress, there needs to be progress in reexamining and strengthening our sense of social justice. This examination cannot occur in a vacuum. Geography education has a vital role to play in this process.

Geography is the study of how things are distributed and interconnected on Earth

In this essay, I will explore two issues in geography education: a) A critique of the state of the space; and, b) Empowering geography education through its Powerful Disciplinary Knowledge (PDK).

State of the Space

Throughout our education system, geography was — and, alas, is — relegated to something you have to study to pass your Boards (Exams) in flying colors. The only goal is to score high marks. There is hardly any other context given to our children for the *need* for geography education.

Rarely, if ever, does the academic environment tell a child that gaining *critical* understanding, *critical* skills, and *critical* applications in geography can empower them in life. A well-paying job is very much a part of this empowerment; but it has become *the* goal.

A good geography education is a powerful way to empower our youth in this way.

What is Geography?

Children continue to be fed this diet of "Geo means Earth, Graphy means study of, ergo *Geography means study of Earth*." This definition can be made more explicit. Some use, *Geography is the study of place.*

I find the definition - *Geography is the study of how things are distributed and interconnected on Earth* – far more useful. I have found that children are able to get a better sense of the nature of the discipline with this definition. They are then able to explore a wider range of concepts and ideas using this definition.

Geography Makes Connections

Take latitudes and longitudes, two fundamental concepts in geography. Children learn about latitude and longitude as "imaginary lines on the surface of the Earth." They are not taught how these lines are useful, what the histories behind their development are, and how they connect with our lives.

As an example, these lines are analogous to the lines we draw to play any number of

games! When students use these to actually play the games, they understand latitudes and longitudes better.

Latitudes are related to the kinds of climates we have, and, thus on the cuisines, festivals, architecture, poetry, performing arts, financial investment choices, and agricultural systems, etc.
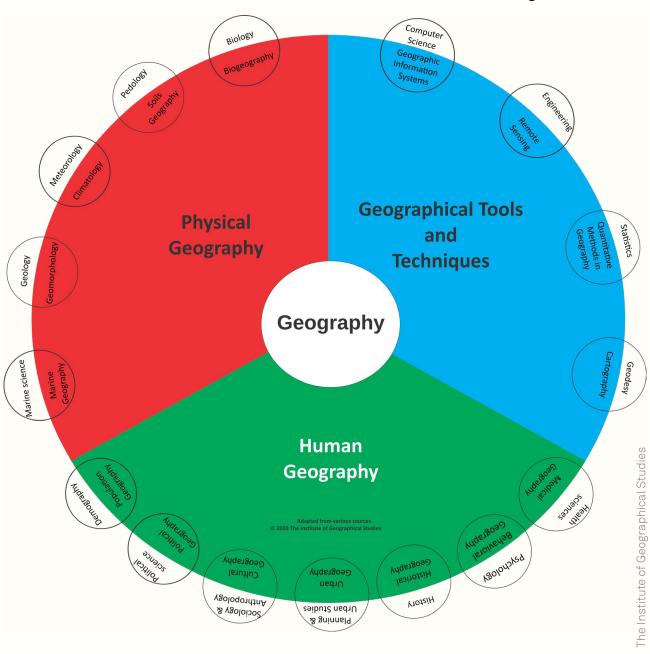
But once the chapter on latitudes and longitudes is done, and you have answered those 1-mark questions correctly, you never look at them.

Likewise, longitudes. The connection between longitudes and time measurement is vaguely made. However, get children to explore the relationship among the urban ailments that IT workers in Bengaluru face and longitude… and they quickly come to the understanding.

They are not taught how they use latitudes and longitudes in *their daily lives* (think GPS, Google maps, Uber routes). Instead, their learning is to be able to answer one question (usually a 'multiple choice' or 'fill in the blank') that asks them, "How many latitudes are there on Earth? (1 mark)" The correct (read *expected* and *accepted*) answer is 179. And there it ends.

Thus, unfortunately, geography education has become all about scoring marks, and not

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about developing critical skills with an early introduction to life's geographical connections. The diagram in the previous page examines how geography connects all disciplines.

Geography's Powerful Disciplinary Knowledge

As the world is changing, and that too very rapidly, geography education needs to empower children by equipping them with three *critical* aspects: understanding, analysis, and skills. Lacking these, contemporary geography education fails to serve the needs of our children and, thus, the needs of society.

Along with technological progress, there needs to be progress in reexamining and strengthening our sense of social justice. This examination cannot occur in a vacuum. Geography education has a vital role to play in this process.

I have often heard university professors complain about the low quality of the students they get in their undergraduate classes. My question to them was: "What are you doing about it?" The answers I have heard have not been encouraging at all.

Geography's Powerful Disciplinary Knowledge (PDK) includes: a) 'a descriptive but also deep "world knowledge"; b) 'a critical conceptual knowledge that has explanatory power in enhancing relational understanding of ideas such as nature/people, physical/social, local/global, etc.; and, c) 'a propensity to think through alternative social, economic and environmental futures in spatial contexts.'

Geography's PDK offers us ways in which we can engage with our world using the theories, information and frameworks offered by the discipline. Ultimately, it gives us the necessary skills and perspectives to wield the power of geography in all that we do.

Personal Geographies

Geography occurs at the level of our individual selves and how we *create* our own geographies. For example, we occupy a *house* (just a building) and make it a *home* (defined by relationships of caring). Every waking hour of our lives, we are shaping and reshaping our geographies. The same power enables us to care for Earth — eco-conscious values and behaviors arise from this power.

Geography and Current Issues

Geography deals with four questions:

1. *Where* is something? Location is the fundamental concept of geography.

2. *Why* is it there? This brings to bear different kinds of histories to help understand the geographical answer to this question.

3. *So what?* What are the *consequences* of it being there?

4. *What if?* What if something were to change? How would that change the issue?

These questions and the related discussions are not being adequately used in geography education in schools in India. And yet, year after year, I have shared this framework with children in classes eight onward to help them conduct geography research in their neighborhoods; the results have been nothing short of spectacular (see here and here). As a simple exercise, readers can apply these 'Four Questions of Geography' to real-life situations and see how such a geography education helps. A few examples follow.

- COVID-19: its origins and spread; the geography of vaccine delivery; etc.

- Farmers' protests near Delhi.

- Here is an example of how three high school girls tackled the topic of menstrual taboos through geography.

IT and Geography

A burgeoning field called *geo-informatics* is being used to perform geographical analyses that help in applying the discipline's knowledge and insights to many issues. These include the monitoring and delivery of public health programmes, disaster relief, and development projects. Equipped with a good foundational geography education, this is a career area that pupils can explore.

On 15 February 2021, the Government of India announced massive liberalization of access to geographical/ geospatial data for private parties to use in order to conduct research and analyses for developmental issues in India. This is a momentous announcement that opens up many opportunities for pupils to explore.

However, that education should begin at the school level, while the children still don't know what *cannot* be done! It should start with making connections between geography and life, developing the ability to ask geography questions, and trying to find solutions to problems, and to improve things that already work. The range of options all lead to them becoming geographically aware, knowledgeable, and equipped.

Conclusion

I have barely touched the tip of the proverbial iceberg in this essay. I hope teachers and other adults who have read this article take on the important task of helping children gain a truly empowering geography education.

I hope they do not wait for the syllabus to mandate such a geography education.

Instead, I urge them to get started now. Let conversations with our youth begin and grow. Let us start empowering our youngsters with Geography's Powerful Disciplinary Knowledge.

Thus, unfortunately, geography education has become all about scoring marks, and not about developing critical skills with an early introduction to life's geographical connections.

You could start this process at many places. I offer one resource base for this: the geography blog at The Institute of Geographical Studies. There you will find a great many connections, at least a few of which might trigger an interest in further explorations of geography.

I always refer to my students as Young Geographers. We are all geographers. Most of us might not realize it, that's all. Here's to developing a new generation of Young Geographers!

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Exploring Social Science Teaching

The Case of the Mentor Teacher Programme in Delhi

Sveta Dave Chakravarty and Shashi Mendiratta

At the Ferdinand Centre (TFC), our work has been at the interface of social sciences learning, building democratic cultures in classrooms and citizenship education. Our work with social sciences teachers has dealt with these and other related areas, to make the dream of democratic learning spaces a reality. The Mentor Program in Delhi was started as an important step in this journey of collaborative learning about social issues.

As we started our work with the Mentor Program in the Delhi School System, we were clear on the need for student learning to be an active process, leading to the building of core capacities, including critical thinking and empathy. Our goal was to create spaces where students can undergo collaborative learning experience in class.

This was to be facilitated through explorations of critical questions, discussions around thought-provoking videos, disturbing news items, articles, and cartoons. The students then must reflect on and process what they experienced.

Learning to Mentor and Mentoring to Learn in Professional Learning Communities

In our experience teacher competence is the main issue at hand. We have found that many teachers do not understand the subjects they are supposed to teach. We were working with Mentor Teachers, who all had extensive classroom experience. Most of them understood one or more subjects really well and could contribute to helping their colleagues to understand all the Social Science subjects. We needed to harness this expertise, especially since teachers, tired of unhelpful, mandated 'trainings,' remain enthusiastic about learning from their peers.

Our goal was to create spaces where students can undergo collaborative learning experience in class

We set up Professional Subject Groups for each of the subjects with a few Mentor Teachers in each group. The idea was to explore concepts deeply and then take a topic at a time to the rest of the Mentor Teachers.

These small groups, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), formed an engaging and safe forum for discussion, with mentors sharing experiences and ideas for taking concepts to class. Inevitably, these sessions led to deep discussion, research and broadening of perspectives and knowledge of the group. Some mentors started taking the ideas to their Mentee Schools.

Apart from advancing Mentor subject knowledge, we had to prepare for sessions with the larger mentor group. We needed a methodology to articulate what really needed to be understood, based on the audience, whether it comprised of teachers or students.

Social Sciences are so interesting that there is no end to how deep and broad one can go. So, we needed a way to prioritise concepts – what must the teacher know and understand

well enough to encourage students to ask questions and enquire into the subject?

The teacher must be prepared and have access to well designed and curated resources like engaging videos, readings and news items to be able to facilitate enquiries into different sub-topics. To ensure subject mastery, the teacher must herself be able to design a curricular unit with these resources.

Understanding by Design

We have found the methodology of *Understanding by Design,* as advocated by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins in their eponymous book, to be very promising for curriculum development. But it has a significant learning curve. The focus on identifying what understandings can be constructed from a particular set of facts, by pursuing an essential question about a particular topic, has served to help mentors (and us) to clarify and deepen our understanding of topics.

Thus, a question such as "In what way did the shifts in power structure in different phases of the French Revolution influence its outcome; in what ways did it have an impact on the world?" would need investigation into phases of the revolution, and then require learners to construct their understanding from these investigations.

A sample summative understanding might be: "Though the French Revolution ended with a return to monarchy, it irreversibly transformed the world by changing the organization of political power, the nature of society, and the exercise of individual freedoms." Education has to lead to understanding at this level, rather than an ability to parrot facts without understanding.

From Training to Co-learning: Traveling the TFC Way

After two years of similar mind-expanding discussions of various topics, mentors are now receptive to using such tools to structure their deepening understanding of the subject. They are beginning to identify ways to help mentee teachers deepen their own subject understanding by using these tools to develop learning modules for them. But it has been a long and tortuous path to this realization; the PLCs will have to figure out ways to shorten the learning curve for teachers.

> We have found the methodology of *Understanding by Design...* to be very promising for curriculum development. But it has a significant learning curve.

Developing regular learning modules will be an effective strategy, we hope, but it remains to be tried out with teachers. When teachers' own subject understanding is deep and broad, and they learn strategies to teach that subject for understanding, and to build core capacities in students, only then will they be able to create unit plans that can transform their classrooms, empowering students to go deep and construct powerful understandings about the world around them.

The modality of 'trainings' has failed spectacularly to change teaching practice; it is far more likely that voluntary and ongoing collaborative learning for teachers will yield better results in classrooms. This process of regular professional learning can be triggered and sustained if the mechanism of the PLC is prioritized by the system with the provision of support (even incentives) for mentors to lead such PLCs and for teachers to join them.

We at TFC are focused on R&D. For us, as for the Mentors, this is a process of active collaborative learning. As a composite PLC of Mentors and TFC, we need to move to the next step, to observe potential solutions working at the teacher and school levels before they can be scaled up. But we have understood

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that these efforts need to be supported and institutionalized as they are shown to work. The learnings will die a quick death if the School System does not evolve to make life easier and more academics-focused for all teachers, including the Mentors.

The Professional Learning Communities can work for teachers in districts. The Mentors now constitute a 30-strong cadre of Social Science teacher educators. But the groups will need support, coordination and encouragement by the Heads of the Schools and District Administrators. The School System must value and invest in this strategy for teacher preparation.

With the Delhi Government's focus on improving education in Government Schools, there is hope for creating this teacher development mechanism for sustained learning improvements of teachers and students. Reaching a place where teachers have subject mastery and teach for deep understanding, where the system regularly develops students who are ready for life beyond school, is a 10-year endeavour. But It is one which will pay rich dividends.

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Shashi Mendiratta, has decades of education development experience as teacher, head of school, teacher educator and researcher. She is now increasingly interested in addressing the learning needs of teachers and students in the most disadvantaged communities.

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Introducing 'Teaching Social Science in Schools' by Alex M. George and Amman Madan

Samuhik Pahal Team

Given the state of our world and country, the way they seem to be hurtling from one man-made disaster to the other, it seems clear that learning about our societies to be able to democratically make informed choices has to be an important part of educational processes. The series of social science textbooks that were produced between the years, 2006 and 2009, after the National Curricular Framework came into being in 2005, were expected to fulfil such a role.

The older NCERT social science textbooks and state-specific social science textbooks were written as plain narration of facts. But these new textbooks employed a narrative style that invited the students to engage with the text material in an active manner. The previous textbooks made the narrated facts appear as self-evident truths, whereas the new social science textbooks focus on the 'how' of the disciplines. This has been a result of the writers self-consciously adopting a critical and dialogic framework while composing these new textbooks.

The responses to these were mixed. There were some criticisms from right wing forces who saw a leftist bias; for example, in negative portrayals of United States of America while discussing democracy. But there were also some genuine concerns expressed by teachers about pedagogic implications of the textbooks for classroom transactions. The new textbooks, especially those of history and those titled 'Social and Political Life' employed a dialogic approach. This made a demand on the teachers to interact with the students frequently and to more or less abandon the 'Lecture Mode.'

The book under discussion, Teaching *Social Science in Schools: NCERT's New Textbook Initiative* was written to address the emerging concerns about the then new NCERT social science textbooks. While doing so, the book also addresses some foundational questions about the very nature of learning in the social sciences disciplines and broader issues of pedagogy and curriculum in India's educational system.

For a relatively short volume, it discusses a fair number of important and very large questions related to social science education at the school level. It also uses extensive excerpts from the NCERT textbooks to make its points and illustrates the ways in which these can be used in classrooms. The book is divided into four parts, each addressing one constituency of the textbooks. All the four chapters are written in a question answer format in which the writers of the volume answer the concerns raised in the questions of parents, teachers, students and educationists about the textbooks.

The first chapter, titled 'Parents' is one of the longer sections of the book and argues for parents playing a much more active role in the process of learning of their children of social science subjects. It deals with their concerns surrounding examinations and careers, the politics of changing textbooks according to political expediency, compatibility across different School Boards, and the critical and constructivist approach taken in a few of the textbooks.

The second chapter, titled 'Teachers' addresses questions surrounding the autonomy of teachers, expected changes in the style of teaching, problems surrounding assessment, activities and projects that the new textbooks have, and the use of supplementary material by teachers. This section also provides information on resources (apart from the textbooks) such as books and online repositories that teachers can use.

The third chapter, titled 'Students' caters to students' concerns about examinations and careers, varied ways in which different social science subjects are taught, the role of memory in learning these disciplines, and the use of cartoons and other visual material in the new textbooks.

The fourth chapter, titled 'Educationists' deal with some broad concerns that educationists might have with the social science textbooks, related to the different pedagogic approaches that the various disciplines follow.

For example, the geography textbooks seem to be wedded to earlier frameworks, whereas the history textbooks focus specifically on the doing of history and the processes through which historical knowledge is generated.

This chapter also discusses some important and relevant concerns that cut across disciplinary boundaries: for example, a) the role of local social experiences in learning social science subjects; b) the level at which learning from local contexts shifts into broader conceptual and country-level insights and knowledge; c) the problems faced by non-specialist teachers teaching social science subjects; and, d) the broader philosophical approaches that guided the writing of these textbooks.

For a book published in 2009, *Teaching Social Science in Schools* still remains relevant reading for anyone interested in the process of teaching and learning of social science in Indian schools. But it is of special value for teachers and teacher trainers who work in these domains. The book is written in a lucid manner. Employing a conversational tone, it discusses complex topics such as philosophical approaches to pedagogy and issues surrounding integrated social science learning with a finesse that make it a model for other similar exercises in the future.
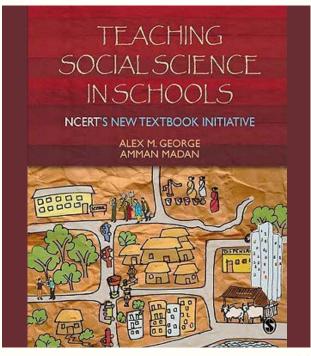
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In Quest of Togetherness: 'Sangati'

Nivedita Dwivedi

The Detective and the Historian

Imagine that you are a detective. You will probably relate the nature of your work to solving jigsaw puzzles. As a detective, you will be required to put together the missing pieces and arrive at a plausible explanation of the situation/event you are examining. This explanation that you arrive at will be a theory that you will formulate, which, according to you, will be the most convincing explanation of the situation under examination. The strength of the theory you formulate will depend on the strength of the evidence that you have in support of your theory.

Now, imagine you are a historian. What kind of work do you think you will be required to do as a historian? Do you think it will have any similarity to the work of a detective as described above? Does the possibility sound too far-fetched to you? If you will pause and reflect for a while, you will realize how similar both tasks are.

A historian is also a person who pieces together parts of a jigsaw puzzle and tries to make sense out of these. Out of the various pieces of evidence available to her, in the form of artefacts, archaeological remains, written and oral narratives, paintings, coins, and so on and so forth, a historian tries to place these in context, weighs them for their authenticity, relates them to other existing pieces of evidence and narratives, and then tries to formulate a narrative or a theory based on these, which, to her, sounds the best explanation for the situation under examination.

Again, the strength of the theory formulated depends on the strength of the evidence provided. A historian, thus, also understands that a theory that she is putting forward is not sacrosanct but is falsifiable, and thus liable to be modified or discarded in the wake of stronger counter evidence emerging. Also, since it is a theory based on her interpretation of the evidence in front of her, the historian also realizes that there may be equally plausible alternate explanations or interpretations of the same evidence, which may lead to other theories.

So, essentially the process of rewriting and reinterpreting lies at the heart of the historical process. However, this reinterpretation needs to conform to the standards of scientific enquiry.

The strength or weakness of all such theories depends on the strength or weakness of the evidence the respective theories are based on and the interpretations provided. Thus, by virtue of the very process involved in the construction and reconstruction of History, there is bound to be a possibility of the existence of multiple histories.

History as 'Detecting' the Past: Learning through the Sangati Curriculum

All of us have studied History as a subject throughout our student lives. How many of us have been encouraged to visualize it in the manner above? I am sure many of us haven't. The above visualization is something that is provided by the Avehi Abacus Project (AA) launched in 1990, through one of its programs titled 'Sangati'.

The above analogy (between the work of a detective and a historian) is drawn in the third kit of the Sangati program, titled 'How Societies Developed'. Sangati is a three-year supplementary program that is being transacted with students of classes V to VII in the municipal schools of Mumbai by their regular school teachers. It comprises of six kits which are transacted mostly once a week, with a variety of pedagogic strategies. These involve the use of group-activities, surveys and data-analysis, self-reflection, art-craft, drawing upon knowledge outside the school, and visual material that is attractive, eclectic and interactive.

The vision underlying the program can be summed-up as follows. Learning according to AA:

- is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes;

- is a continuous process, grounded in experience;

- is a holistic process of adaptation to the world;

- involves an understanding of the give-and-take between the person and the environment;

- implies knowledge acquired as a result of the interaction between social and personal experience; therefore, underlying all this are value systems.

—(AA website, 2001).

The six interlinked themes flow logically and seamlessly into each other. The journey starts with understanding oneself, one's body and the needs that all human beings possess. While the needs are common to all, they are met in diverse manner, and not provided for equally to all.

All these needs are met by resources provided by the earth. The second kit then moves on to 'Our earth and the web of life' that we are a part of. The attempt here is to understand our place in the universe and how complex and prolonged the process of evolution of life on earth has been. It is hoped these inputs will form the basis of creating feelings of humility towards nature.

The third kit then moves on to 'How societies developed' over time, across the world.

Learning About Our Social World Through Activities

Avehi Abacus Project

This kit encapsulates the history of human civilizations from early times to the 1950s. The focus is on phenomena, structures and processes, rather than on isolated events or characters. History is looked at as a collective heritage and is constantly connected with the present. Historical events are located in the context of the geographies they are enfolded in, adding more layers to understanding why they happened, and how the conditions prevalent in the space influenced them.

The fourth kit focusses on our society and 'The way we live' in the present, discussing various issues such as caste, religion and gender discrimination, and understanding our conceptions about patriotism, democracy, and the influence of media etc.

As change is a constant and continuous phenomenon, the next kit then focusses on 'Understanding change', and analysing it better, so that we can 'create the society we want' by developing a discerning mindset about the prevalent development paradigm to differentiate between 'change and progress'.

the Sangati curriculum... does not limit History to dates and times, to kings and the boundaries of their empires, or does not try to colour it one way or the other.

The curriculum ends with a forward-looking note and helps understand how to 'Prepare for the future', as an individual and as a society. The entire curriculum is designed to be interactive and joyful, to replace "teaching' by a voyage of exploration to discover facets of ourselves, our society and the world, to accommodate the understanding that each child thinks and learns differently, to encourage students to express their thoughts and share their life experiences, to help them cope with different

situations and make the right choices, and determine better futures for themselves and those around them" (AA, Dear Teacher..., 2001).

Crossing Boundaries of Learning

Although, the Sangati curriculum is not discipline-based and restricted to subject-boundaries, yet just for the sake of comparison, Kit III, titled 'How societies developed', can be related to History.

However, it has a very different take on how and why students need to be made aware of 'History'. First and foremost, it does not talk about one single 'History', but of multiple histories, of kings as of common people, of wars as of their futility, of path-breaking events as of their impact –positive or negative depending on social locations of different sub-groups, in India and the world.

It does not limit History to dates and times, to kings and the boundaries of their empires, or does not try to colour it one way or the other. Instead, it encourages students to live it, to explore and to discover it, to go through the excitement of finding the pieces of jigsaw puzzle and trying to put them together in a way they think is most plausible.

It, then, does-not discredit one arrangement of jigsaw puzzle in favour of the other, instead it gives the message that many different arrangements are possible, and all will equally have to stand the test of falsifiability. It titillates and challenges the minds of the students, encouraging them to play with ideas and look at things holistically.

Avehi Curriculum Vs Textbook History

History, in the school textbooks in Maharashtra, is generally presented as a finished product that must be accepted as it is. This is completely in contrast to the alternate vision of Avehi Abacus, where it is treated as a process and a journey of exploration, waiting to be undertaken by young and curious minds. One views 'History'

as a dynamic living process, the other as a static end-product that is too fragile to be tampered with in any manner and must be taken in the form it is presented, no questions asked.

In the context of attempts to rewrite history, Neeladri Bhattacharya states, "The past does-not come to us with a unitary truth embedded within it; the facts that historians mine do not ever speak with one single voice. As our perspectives change, we look at the past in new ways, reinterpret events, discover new meanings within them, pose new questions that could not even be formulated within the limits of earlier frameworks of analysis. So historians tell different stories of the same past, refigure evidence in diverse ways in the act of rewriting history – an act that enriches the conceptions of our past." (Bhattacharya, 2002).

So, essentially the process of rewriting and reinterpreting lies at the heart of the historical process. However, this reinterpretation needs to conform to the standards of scientific enquiry. It needs to be based on legitimate evidence. It needs to put those evidence out in the open for scrutiny and examination. The theories that are put forward need to be falsifiable. Each and every statement that is made needs to be supported by some evidence and also has to be open to challenge in the face of a counter-evidence.

We also need to realize and acknowledge the efforts of those who have been trying to put forward counter narratives, challenging and questioning the above process of fabricating history and providing an alternative vision, that is based on the principles of enquiry rather than a final word that is considered to be sacrosanct. In such a vision, the values of today are tested on the anvil of the past values and vice versa, making them the stuff of real life and not as the deified glorious past or a binary of good vs evil. Avehi Abacus Project and 'Sangati' are the living embodiments of such a vision.

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Social Sciences Teaching and Learning

S Routray

How are education non-profits working with social sciences teaching and learning to make classroom transactions fun and socially relevant?

Social sciences teaching-learning has rarely been a focus of governmental attention in India. In the wider society, these subjects are seen as being 'softer' disciplines and are perceived as having not much relevance in an increasingly competitive job market. Manifestations of these processes range from neglect of teachers' training in these subjects, the inability of the curricula to keep pace with advances in the disciplines, pedagogic conservatism that converts the learning of these subjects to a mere parroting of facts, and inadequate investments in Teaching Learning Material (TLM) creation in these subjects that are contextually relevant but at the same time conceptually sophisticated.

But many non-governmental organizations working in education have started intervening in this area, and are making it a focus of their attention. We spoke to non-profits such as Eklavya (Madhya Pradesh - MP), Patang (Odisha), Synergy Sansthan (MP), and We the People (Delhi) to understand their work related to teaching and learning of social science subjects. They have been trying to make these processes learner-friendly. Some of them have been trying to use the understanding gained by this work as a trigger for positive social action as well.

Learnings from a Two-Decade Long Experiment

Eklavya formally began working in the field of social science education in 1983. This was an experiment that was started in eight schools in Madhya Pradesh and continued for nearly two decades. This has perhaps been one of the most sustained engagements in social science education at the school level in India, or for that matter, anywhere else in the world.

Eklavya's Social Science Program never bought into the magical faith in the transformative power of the 'best textbook' as many educational initiatives in India are sometimes wont to do.

From the very beginning, the work of Eklavya in social science education has been characterized by many features that have made this an experiment worth emulating. One of the most important aspects of the organization's Social Science Program has been that it adopted a multi-pronged approach. As a part of this strategy, Eklavya tried to address both curricular concerns and the development of child-centric educational approaches related to learning processes of social sciences subjects.

Samvidhan Mela

Synergy Sansthan

The subsequent curricular innovations and educational experiments kept the experiences of students and teachers at the center of classroom transactions. The organization also innovated with assessment patterns that did justice to the experiments in curriculum and pedagogy, and whetted the children's curiosity. It also took the teachers along through a process of training and co-learning, and created a set of textbooks that even now remain models of such writing.

Eklavya also facilitated a productive interface of the experiences of university teachers of social sciences disciplines, school teachers, and education activists in developing context-specific curriculum and pedagogy in social science subjects. The education activists working in the social science group in Eklavya came from a large number of related disciplines. This got translated into practice in many different ways. The first was related to textbooks.

> "What it means to be a citizen should be very clear and rooted in students. They must have the understanding that citizenship is something that we all need to play a vital role in."
>
> - Sana

According to Arvind from Eklavya, "Faithfulness to disciplinary learning and practice, and age-appropriate choice of thematic topics have been the two poles around which debates surrounding TLM and textbook creation have traditionally mapped out. The Eklavya team trod the middle ground here, although leaning slightly towards a more disciplinary orientation; but this varied from subject to subject."

In the history textbooks that Eklavya's Social Science Program created, for example, the focus shifted from political history involving the chronology of dynasties and the exploits of kings to social history that tells us more about how common people lived in the past - for example, about what clothes they wore and what food they ate.

By unburdening the curriculum through the removal of some topics and details of political history, and the inclusion of those aspects of social history that have had immediate relevance to the children's lives, these textbooks were able to make history come alive for them. As a matter of curricular principle, in History, the chronological approach was followed with the focus remaining on the dynamics between continuity and change.

Commenting on the TLM preparation process, Arvind says, "These books were as different from conventional textbooks in India as possible, as we 'trialed' these in the field. Which is to say that after the first version was produced, these were then transacted in the classrooms. Feedback from students and teachers was taken, and experts were invited to observe classroom processes. Through robust experimentation, these textbooks were finalized with the teachers' voices finding important spaces in the final versions."

Following this process also meant, that the production of these textbooks was seen as part of a larger process of intervention spanning curricular innovation, pedagogic change, assessment reform, and teacher training. Eklavya's Social Science Program never bought into the magical faith in the transformative power of the 'best textbook' as many educational initiatives in India are sometimes wont to do.

This was possible because of Eklavya's larger social vision, where the effectiveness of improved socials sciences teaching and learning had to translate into a broader process of conscientization and positive social change. Even in this, Eklavya tried to tread the middle ground between making

the learning of the social sciences fun and developing the ability to use such knowledge for constructive social action.

Bridging Civics Education and Civic Action

An important contemporary initiative in this regard is the set of Civic Action Projects that the NCR-based organization We the People (WTP) implements with school children in the context of civics education. As a part of this initiative, WTP collaboratively works with schools, civics teachers, and students to pick up projects from their curriculum, especially from the social science subjects. Sometimes students end up doing some action project that is already a part of their coursework.

These projects try to inculcate this idea in students, that if they see an issue around them, such as non-functional streetlights, they should take up the responsibility and try and address it. Possible ways in which children have approached such issues is by doing some research around their solution, contacting relevant department officials, and writing applications and articles for newspapers etc. The organization handholds this process while the students take the lead.

Through this experience, students develop a sense of how the governance system works, clarify concepts that they have learned in their social science curriculum, especially in civics, and start becoming active citizens. WTP helps students make the connections between their experiences in these projects with fundamental rights and values as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Teachers play an important role in this process.

Through this initiative WTP makes an important contribution to social science teaching-learning by productively working across the domains of civics education and citizenship education. The organization attempts to not only provide students with opportunities and experiences of civic activism, but also to deepen their learning

of the subject of civics and make it more meaningful. By making experiential learning a part of civics education, WTP is trying to make it more interesting and engaging.

According to Sana from the organization, "We never feel that this subject is of use in our real life. But it is one of the most important subjects, because everyone is ultimately going to be a citizen. What it means to be a citizen should be very clear and rooted in students. They must have the understanding that citizenship is something that we all need to play a vital role in. So, we try to bridge that gap and build connections between the Constitution of India with citizens of the country - between 'We the people' and the government. So, that's how we look at it."

WTP plays this crucial role of bridging between civics education and citizenship education by collaboratively figuring out possible areas of intervention with schools, teachers, and students. Working with teachers, and using the existing curricula in schools, have been integral aspects of such a process. The Delhi Government's Mentor Teacher Program is a case in point. WTP has used the radical potential of this program by working intensively with mentor teachers to extend and deepen the reach of the organization's initiative in civics education.

Sana says, "We had topic-wise, regular training of these teachers, and we took their feedback. It's the point where we face the challenges, and then we work on those challenges, taking it further. So, initially, we were regularly engaging with these mentor teachers for social sciences in Delhi. But then, over time, it lessened because of many factors. One important reason was that a large number of them were now trained. Through the social science mentor teachers and with the education department, we also ran a campaign called 'Constitution@70' when we completed 70 years of the Constitution. That was a one-year-long campaign where we touched upon all the constitutional values. Once this Constitution@70 campaign got over, considering its success and impact on students, it was converted into a detailed curriculum. It is yet to be launched by the Government of Delhi. This proposed curriculum will involve students and all teachers, including those teaching social science subjects."

Patang

Co-Learning in Citizenship

Through its initiatives in civics education and work on inculcating constitutional values, WTP is trying to bring together classroom learning and civic action in an organic and integral way. Another frame within which organizations are working at building bridges between the two is by making certain social science conceptualizations and frameworks central to both their programmatic interventions in classrooms and their vision of social transformation.

Social Change through Social Learning

A good example of this is the way in which Patang, an organization that works in Odisha on issues surrounding the youth, volunteering for positive social change and education has approached the concerns surrounding gender. Patang sees gender as an important lens through which to locate social processes and hierarchies. It also considers gender-sensitive social interventions as important methods through which one can transform inequitable social relations and walk towards the goal of an egalitarian society. The organization does this through both its own organizational practices as well as in the pedagogic interventions in classrooms.

Patang started seriously thinking about gender through its work with the youth. Lack of gender sensitivity and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) were seen as important gaps in the thinking of youth leaders. The organization started developing modules around these issues and transacted them with youth groups; soon, tangible positive results were visible.

Young adults, especially boys, started taking the initiative in changing conditions in their families and communities that hampered the freedom and mobility of girls and women. These were often related to continuing education, the age of marriage, and questions surrounding SRH.

When Patang started working in schools, it naturally carried these concerns and strategies to the primary and upper primary classrooms. According to Rupesh and Bhumisuta from the organization, "After obtaining permission from the authorities,

we conduct a forty hours long module on 'Gender and Life Skills' after an initial round of conversations and context setting with the schools. Through an interactive process between facilitators and students in which teachers also participate, children learn about the socially constructed nature of gender identities, SRH and ways of addressing gender-related inequities in our homes and communities."

Eklavya also facilitated a productive interface of the experiences of university teachers of social sciences disciplines, school teachers, and education activists in developing context-specific curriculum and pedagogy in social science subjects.

According to Bhumisuta, "an important step for Patang in this journey has been a process assessing existing textbooks in schools from classes I to VIII being transacted in the governmental schools in the state. We found that the textbooks were written from the perspective of men, and often represented gender relations in a non-egalitarian manner. For example, these often put across care-giving work as the exclusive preserve of women. They were also written mostly by 'upper-caste' men, with women writers occasionally finding a token representation."

So when Patang went on to create TLM on various subjects, from the very beginning, they were alert to the gendered dimensions of such a process. They took care to ensure the participation of women in the creation of such material, made all their pedagogic material (even when not overtly related to women's issues) gender-sensitive, formulated their classroom transactions in such a way that ensured the effective participation of girls, and allowed for healthy

Synergy Sansthan

interactions across genders to challenge gendered stereotypes.

> ...tribal societies are far more democratic compared to caste-ridden rural communities. Children from the tribal communities have already internalized egalitarian values to a large extent.

In schools where Patang intervenes, students undertake action projects related to themes on gender. In one of the schools where Patang intervened, children questioned the logic of having separate water sources for girls and boys and initiated a process that terminated this practice. Students in these schools also co-create cultural programs in the form of plays, skits, songs, etc., on gender that they present to the school and then in front of the larger community. This takes the form of a day-long *mela* in the village, which then provides a site for community-wide learning.

Synergising Civics Education the Synergy Way

Synergy Sansthan, which works with children and youth in Madhya Pradesh, organizes similar sets of events at the village level that it calls the 'Samvidhan Melas' – literally 'Constitution Fairs/Festivals.' In these one-day festivals, children from the schools in which the organization works present to the whole village their learnings on the constitution over the preceding year. They do this by putting up exhibitions, staging plays, and singing songs – all on themes related to their learnings of the constitution, its values, and the ways in which it interfaces with our systems of governance. This work is a natural outcome of the work that the organization does with Samvidhan Clubs that it runs in schools with students as active members. These clubs serve as a training ground for children in constitutional values, and democratic norms and functioning. Through these clubs, Synergy Sansthan tries to evolve processes where children can meaningfully become a part of co-creating schools as democratic spaces.

This work of the organization in engaging with high school students (those studying in standards 6th to 10th) is a natural progression of its work with the youth of the region. Synergy has been working with the latter in conscientizing them through a process of co-learning of the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution of India. When Synergy initiated this work in the schools, it faced some important challenges.

As Vishnu from Synergy says, "Working with school children is more challenging because we are working with them in a formal institutional set up with a pre-set curriculum. With the youth, the work is happening in the community, where many issues such as caste discrimination are relatively easier to raise. The youth also already have a certain amount of experience of the political and governance system. So when we work with them, we try and build upon that experience. Whereas with children, one has to begin with the basics – the self, the family, and the immediate community context –in civics classes to make further discussions surrounding the constitution, its values, and the political/administrative systems possible. Some teachers are supportive of our work, and are interested in co-learning new teaching methods with us. But many of them come from older traditions of pedagogy where making learning fun is seen as potentially giving rise to disciplinary issues. It is also part of a larger systemic issue because many teachers in social sciences were trained years earlier. Unlike other subjects, training in the social science subjects has not taken place for the last many years."

Despite these challenges, Synergy has been able to make many strides towards ensuring effective civics education in the areas in which it works. The first step was to review the existing textbooks and curriculum. The existing textbooks are often unwieldy and unusable because they are written in the dominant dialect of Hindi, which most children do not have much familiarity with.

Further, the language used for writing the textbooks is a formal, academic one. These books are comprised of summaries of materials from M.A. level textbooks. Even some of the facilitators find the language dense and difficult to make sense of.

"We found that the textbooks were written from the perspective of men, and often represented gender relations in a non-egalitarian manner. For example, these often put across caregiving work as the exclusive preserve of women." - Bhumisuta

Therefore, the team decided to create new TLM, within the existing curricular framework, by using material covered in the textbooks. The organization then prepared lesson plans for relevant themes and concepts, and created modules to be transacted in the classrooms. Each of the modules prepared by Synergy has undergone four to five iterations. After each draft was ready, it was trialed in the classroom with students, teachers and facilitators; the responses of each of these groups were incorporated in the subsequent draft.

The modules are designed to allow for activity-based learning, while covering the existing syllabus for the subject of civics. The sessions incorporate local games, role plays, projects, and activities, and start with the experiences of the children and their immediate social context to begin wider deliberations on social issues, governance systems, and our constitution and its values. Through this process of constant iteration, while working with civics education in schools, Synergy has also learned many things about its own social context.

While working in schools in rural areas, the organization realized that children from such contexts came from families and communities where hierarchies were pervasive. Therefore, a lot more intensive work related to democratic values had to be undertaken with them. Whereas in the case of schools in tribal areas, more work was needed in making the language of the TLM accessible.

Children from Scheduled Tribe communities had their own mother tongues that were very different from the language of the modules and that of the textbooks. But regarding values, the work that was needed with them was much lesser, as tribal societies are far more democratic compared to caste-ridden rural communities.

Children from the tribal communities have already internalized egalitarian values to a large extent. Therefore, working with them has reaffirmed the organization's orientation towards constitutional values and the need for building interfaces between students' lived experiences and social contexts, and learning process in classrooms.

In Conclusion

Organizations across India are working on social sciences teaching-learning in schools in ways that are building upon past experiences in the field and are responsive towards challenges of the present. Because of contextual factors, the focus increasingly seems to be on civics, citizenship, and constitutional values. Many organizations are using such pedagogic interventions to build deeper linkages between the classroom and the community. They are using these as learning opportunities to deepen their own understanding of the contexts in which they work, and make their own internal organizational processes better attuned to constitutional values.

Developing effective curricular and pedagogic strategies in social science teaching-learning that are context-specific and help children build larger conceptual worlds is a challenging process. The organizations we talked to are doing deep and meaningful work in this regard, although disciplines such as geography and history need much more focused and sustained initiatives. Wider social apathy for such knowledge and the slow response from the public education system remain important challenges that need to be overcome.

You can reach out to the organizations featured in this story at: info@eklavya.in (Eklavya), info@wethepeople.ooo (We The People), team@patangindia.org (Patang), and synergysansthan@gmail.com (Synergy Sansthan).

A Community Class in Progress

Synergy Sansthan