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Digantar Report

EVS in Digantar School, Jaipur

Teaching and learning of EVS in Digantar schools is a true example of how theory can be linked with practice. This report will focus on the teaching and learning environment in EVS classrooms on the basis of theories learnt and guidelines of NCF 2005.

The term 'alternative' envisages the philosophy of Digantar which is different from the conventional schools and it somehow makes possible the guidelines of NCF 2005.

For example: NCF 2005 has focussed on the child and his/her context.

Digantar's curriculum too has a tendency to become child specific. Hence, each perspective of the child is

welcomed in the classroom. While discussing about, say, edibility, the child's experiences were discussed making children an active part of the classroom.

Even though the classrooms were multilevel based, we in our observations, found all the children working on one common topic discussed in the class.

Also, the interest of the child is given importance in the Digantar schools, so if one child was not willing to study at that time, s/he was allowed to either go in the library or sleep in the class or do his/her own work.

The use of discussion, observation, questioning, reasoning were seen intensively in the EVS classroom. The students were taken out of the classroom to learn about different types of plants, trees around them.

Each student was assigned one tree of his/her own of which s/he took full care of. (sense of ownership). The children also learnt about the concept of 'Solubility' themselves while the teacher guided them on how to go about the experiment, and thus, they came to certain conclusions themselves. (pg - 18-19)

This was done through the below mentioned ways.

While importance was given to personal experiences of the child through discussions, another social perspective was given to them because ~~so~~ most of the children belonged to Muslim families. Hence, an effort was made to make the child not just stick to his/her own experiences but also move beyond it and have/accept different perspectives.

EVS' very important skill classification was focused upon. For that, the students were asked to classify the soluble and insoluble material out of

salt, sugar and chalk powder, when the experiment related to solubility was being conducted.

The students weren't provided with a definition or direct answers.

They were provided with materials and thus, hands-on experiences and discussions took place.

A lot of things have come up through this simple activity. Gandhi ji talks about learning while doing and this is exactly what was being done in the class. Apart from this, the comfort of the child on which even the NCF 2005 emphasises was taken care of.

Bruner, too, has focussed on learning by experiences of the child. The child constructs his/her own knowledge and is learning for himself/herself.

Teaching concepts by taking in the social and physical context of the child made the given tasks meaningful. It wasn't a mechanical process that would involve any kind of

rote-learning.

We have learnt that environmental studies, as the name suggests is knowing about the surroundings and hence, most of the EVS classes we observed had absolutely no lecture mode. Lecture mode sometimes makes the child passive. And for children to be active is very important, as even Piaget pointed out.

Vygotsky, in his socio-cultural theory, talks about the importance of interaction with the society. Hence, talking to peers and discussions with them become important.

Using words from the social context of the child has another point to notice. Using words like जमलौ, आथो, कलौ, etc. made it more relatable to the child.

While discussing about the plants and trees, the teacher started discussing about some very common differences that could be noticed

at once. And then moved on to other differences, thus, moving from simple to complex, likewise from concrete to abstract.

Edgar Dale rightly tells us about moving from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract in the classrooms, and direct purposeful experiences.
(Cone of Experience)

What makes Digantar different is the fact that EVS. is not just studied in the EVS classrooms but is also moved beyond it.

Gandhiji and Gijubhai gave a lot of importance to cleanliness, which is also an important theme of EVS. This is ensured in Digantar Schools, where everyone irrespective of their position in the school cleans the school and their classrooms and washrooms, and then they have ^{their} classes.

EVS is also taught through storytelling as well as through rhymes, that have been taken from the child's community. Hence, the students are seen enjoying it thoroughly.

The teacher in the Digantar classrooms created a non-threatening environment, where unlike other conventional schools, s/he was not an authoritative figure. The students were given freedom to discuss, express, negotiate and make decisions.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, in his Ecological Systems Theory, talks about two systems - Microsystem to Exosystem and then Macrosystem. That is seen evidently in the classes as well as in the EVS textbooks. In the textbook too, the themes start from the child moving to his/her extended families, neighbours, to the world outside.

The teacher also encouraged students to think by asking questions like क्या पैड़ पानी पीते होंगे? खाना खाते होंगे? , आपको क्या लगता है इन तीनों में कौन पानी के साथ जुड़ेगा? (while demonstrating the experiment of "solubility"), etc., thus making them think and then reflect rather than simply writing answers on the board.

One of the important aspects of teaching EVS is through discovery, through inquiry and by constructing knowledge. It is also important to keep the curiosity of the child alive (as also mentioned in NCF 2005). Digantar Schools, through no-examination system, makes them possible by assessing child on the basis of how much s/he has grown rather than creating competition.