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"Environment studies is about analysing and knowing oneself and the environment/ surrounding around us."

Located just outside of Jaipur, Rajasthan, Digantar Shiksha Evam Khetkud Samiti has been working in alternative education for rural children since its founding in 1978. Digantar Vidyalay have been using Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) since 1978, an approach that has been highly recommended by NCF 2005 and RTE.

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

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

Gandhiji and Gijubhai gave a lot of importance to cleanliness which is also an important theme of EVS, and in Digantar, everyone irrespective of their position in the school cleans the school, the classrooms, washrooms, etc before the classes. This was in their school culture.

1002? This is then followed by the assembly in the respective samoochs. Certain themes like nation, nationalism and gender are addressed in the assembly through discussions and self-written poems. Other activities focus on the engagement with the environment like closing the eyes and just trying to listen to the environment.

Other activities in the school included Carpentry and plumbing, which provides the students these basic skills and also forms a notion of dignity and respect for every profession.

EVS Pedagogy specific.

NCF 2005 has focused on the child and his/her context. Digantari's curriculum too has a tendency to become child specific.

Though there was ability grouping within the classroom for every subject, all the students were on the same level with respect to EVS.

EVS classrooms were mostly discussion based, and the activities and discussions happened in a circle. The infrastructure and philosophies of the school played a very important role in this, as students can easily move, shift and make circles / groups within the classroom.

The use of discussion, observation, questioning and reasoning were seen intensively in the EVS classrooms. Importance was given to each child's personal experiences while discussing. The discussion on the 'types of houses' began with a question imposed by the teacher - 'घर की आवश्यकता क्यों?' followed by 'घर किस किस पदार्थ के होते हैं?'. The students gave numerous responses and each answer was accepted and written on the board. Classification as a skill came after the discussion and students were asked to classify the types of houses according to their own criteria. Perspective of each child was taken into account. The students were, thus, never provided with a fixed definition or direct answers as Bruner has also focused on learning by experiences of the child. (The child constructs his/her knowledge and learns by themselves).

Gandhiji talks about learning while doing, and this is exactly what was being done in the classroom. To learn about Kharif and Rabi crops, students tried to grow certain crops in the land of the school and gained a better understanding, not just about the crops, but also about the processes of farming like preparing the land, fertility of the land, sowing, harvesting, etc.

Students were, thus involved in learning while doing and other hands-on activity. For learning about things that float or sink, students brought a bucket full of water and tried throwing and putting in things. They also recorded and analyzed their own data (table). There was no mechanical process involved, and all the learning was meaningful.

Using words from the Social context of the child has another point to notice. Words like 'उड़ती', and 'डूबती' were used to explain the things in a better way. Vygotsky, in his socio-cultural theory also talks about this social context and the importance of interaction with the society. Hence, talking to peers, family and elders in the society became important.

The teacher often talked about the sources of knowledge which included books, magazines, newspapers, internet, story books, etc. But families, neighbours and elders of the society were considered to be the primary source of information for children. Children were often encouraged to sit and talk to elders about their times and listen to ^{their} stories.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, in his, Ecological systems theory, talks about two systems - microsystem to Exosystem and then Macrosystem. This is seen

evidently in the classes as well as in the EVS textbooks. The themes start from the child moving to his/her extended families, neighbours and to the world outside.

Some other important observations -

- NCF 2005 and Digantar focuses on the comfort and the interest of the child. In Digantar schools, if ~~the~~ a child is not willing to study at a particular time, s/he was allowed to either go to the library, sleep in the class or do any other work in the classroom.
- The teacher in the Digantar classrooms created a non-threatening environment. They were not an authoritative figure in the classroom. The students were given freedom to discuss, express, negotiate and make decisions or rules.
- The teacher had autonomy and freedom within the classroom. The teacher made plans for each individual, each subject, everyday. These plans were discussed in the weekly meetings. Problems related to the plans were shared and suggestions were given by other teachers.

- Every topic or current news were shared in the classroom and were discussed critically by the students. All the stories related to Diwali were discussed and questions such as 'Is it really practically possible' were asked. Incidents of Lynching were also discussed in the classroom.
- Each child was assessed daily on the basis of the work they did in the classroom. There was no concept of formative or summative examinations, but students who were prepared enough according to the curriculum of 5th standard, had to give board examinations. But still there was no pressure.

In conclusion, EVS is taught through discovery, through inquiry and by constructing their own knowledge. It is also important to keep the curiosity of the child alive.
- (NCF 2005)

Data and theory are coming together in an interesting manner. Yet a lot of dimensions could have been analysed beyond what is given.

Najia
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