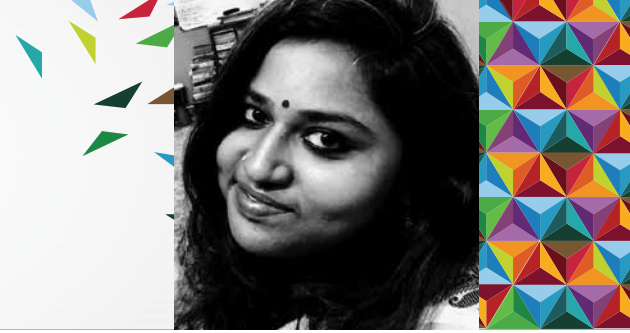


Textbooks as Tools for Building Teacher-Student Relationships - A Perspective

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Overview: The article explores the use of textbooks as a Teaching Learning Material in the classrooms. The article seeks to understand whether the design and usage of textbooks helps towards building whether relationships between the teacher and the learner.

School has an important place in the democratic practice. The classrooms act as a microcosm for linking the macro level society with the micro level processes that takes place within it. But often the question rises, is the very act of going to school and participating in a classroom transformative for the society? If so, what tools for classroom practices aids towards creating such emancipatory experiences? With the focus shifting to child-centric learning, the discourses on textbooks has gathered a lot of momentum in the country. Within the system of schooling, the textbooks occupy a central position to enable teachers to design learning spaces to achieve specific goals for their students and demand a special inquiry.

In public education system, the textbook discourses often emphasise its need on the basis of ensuring quality and effectiveness in the implementation of curricular objectives. Their universality in the practical use of day to day classroom transaction, and their symbolic function in achieving the educational ideals is evident from how a teacher is tied to the prescribed textbook. Every subject comes prescribed with a textbook which a teacher is expected to complete in the academic year, create her instructional plans using it, ensure students complete the exercises prescribed within it, and design examinations to assess students' knowledge within its purview. Any deviation from the textbook is not accepted; from the state, the school authorities, the parents, and even from the students. The textbooks embody authority that teachers within the education system cannot refute. This authority of the textbook developed within the centralised examination structure of public education in our country, creates a particular positioning of the teacher and the learner within the larger system and forges a particular relationship between them.

Much has been researched and contested in the

domain of 'textbook culture' - the teacher- textbook conflict, the colonial roots of textbook culture, the role of textbook in nation building, and the construction of knowledge, etc. All these raise critical and relevant questions about its role in the educational process and its importance in building 'ideal' citizens for the democracy. Textbooks are put out as the sites for "official knowledge" and they often remain only source of knowledge for many children in the crucial stages of their socio-cognitive stages of development. It is within the layout of the textbooks and their use in the classrooms the learners are introduced to the larger goals of education through concrete bits of information, concepts, exercises, visuals, etc. A child's conception of the world, its organization, and functioning, is shaped in crucial ways by the textbook design and the way it is used in the classroom.

In an educational system which capsules time, and disciplines its primary actors to jump from one subject to other ritualistically day in and day out, the question of experience takes a back seat. This raises the larger question that whether in the current design and usage of textbooks in schools, is it in its nature to create an emancipatory classroom experience for the learner and the teacher alike. One of the elements that textbooks as a central teaching- learning aid demand inquiry is what kind of relationship they build between the teacher and the learner.

Alasdair McIntyre (1985), a Scottish Philosopher, states that any social practice is a complex, socially established, and cooperative human activity. One has to achieve excellence by participating in the standards defined and appropriate to that form of activity to realise its goods. In order to achieve these goods, he claims that strong relationship needs to be established between those who participate in them. The participants need to treat each other fairly honestly, and act out of conviction. These virtues are necessary conditions for the continuation of any practice. Within MacIntyre's conception, we can assume with conviction that education is a social practice. For the pursuit of excellence, the teachers have a responsibility of designing learning spaces that would encourage



students to develop compassion, moral and intellectual autonomy with an ethic of care for their peers. Such learning spaces would encourage teachers and the students to make connections with their life, be observant of their social world, have interdisciplinary approaches, and generate empathetic relations with their surroundings. Thus, the relationship between the teacher and learner forms the core of any educational practice. Does a textbook centred curriculum act as an enabler for building such relationships and creating such experiences in the classrooms?

Let us take an instance of the visual representation in textbook layout and its usage in the classroom. While the visuals present one representational process, the words and the sentences present the other. The cognitive processes of constructing and assimilating knowledge occur when the learner is socialised through experiential processes within cultures of representation. For example, while reading a social science textbook, the words as well as the picture clues aid the learner towards understanding the event and the social representation of the actors (gender, class, caste, etc.) through the colour of the skin, the design of clothes, and the narrative of the incident shared, etc. The information presented along with the visual clues and exercises should act as a pedagogical tool. It should enable learners to develop processes to construct knowledge by making connections with their own lives. Thus, the act of meaning making of the concrete information, concepts, and exercises provided in the textbooks is not a simple natural process. It entails complex cognitive, socio-cultural, and political processes. As a tool, the textbook has to aid the teacher in directing the attention of the students towards these visual and written clues. The textbooks within their design should embed the pedagogical component that would aid the teacher in creating experiences in the process of learning. In the absence of this pedagogical component the teacher often ends up being a passive delivery

agent of the prescribed curriculum and children become the passive recipients of knowledge. The classroom experience often gets reduced to reading the chapter, summarizing the information shared, and completing the exercises for the upcoming test. Within the devoid of creating an experience, the textbook often fails to serve its purpose as a tool.

A tool or an aid by the virtue of creating an experience, brings forth the conflicts and contestations of knowledge and its properties. The learners wade through these conflicts by trusting the teacher, and by collaborating with their peers. With the absence of these processes built within a textbook, the homogenised, fragmented knowledge, gets away without any inquiry.

The children march from one scientific concept to another, from one historical event to another, and one formula to another with no consequences of internalising them, thus making learning an impersonal act.

This conception of textbook- in its design and usage would not provide scope for other educational reform in the sphere of teacher education, assessments, accountability, etc. In the past years, there have been changes in the textbook design in NCERT books as well as those designed by private publishers. The lessons have become more interactive and there have been attempts to integrate subjects. Despite of it, their usage in most of the classrooms still follows the same routine and the student-teacher relationships are still dominated by textbooks. If we imagine teachers to have moral and intellectual autonomy in their classrooms, a new kind of relationship has to be conceived for looking at teacher and the textbooks. The teachers should be empowered with pedagogical content knowledge to critically understand the effective use of textbooks as a TLM in their classrooms. For developing such understanding of the textbooks and its usage for creating experiential learning practices, teacher education should focus on developing critical literacy in teachers.

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