

Workbooks or Playbooks? – Experience of Developing workbooks for Rajasthan Government Schools

Aanchal Chomal



Azim Premji Foundation conducted an assessment of Mathematics, Environmental Science and Language learning in Classes I to V of government schools in Rajasthan as part of one of its programs, known as the Learning Guarantee Program. The study showed very low levels of learning in basic reading, writing, mathematical operations and simple connections to the environment. This drew out from teachers a constant demand, ‘Help us to impart true competencies.’ The textbook, totally teacher-driven, had so far been the sole resource, for transacting the subjects. Teachers felt the need for something that would supplement the textbooks, so as to open doors to multiple ways of transacting the lessons - and they did not feel that mere teacher training would serve that purpose. This led to the genesis of the project of developing workbooks.

At the invitation of the State Project Director, **Azim Premji Foundation** (in collaboration with **Digantar** and **Vidya Bhawan Society**) developed workbooks for the State of Rajasthan - for all the 78,000 schools which deal with almost about 1.5 crore children across Grades 1-8. One team was constituted at Jaipur (with Digantar) and another at Udaipur (with Vidya Bhawan Society) for a period of about 6-8 months. Workbooks for Grades 1 to 5 were for the subjects- Hindi, Mathematics and Environmental Studies, while for Grades 6 to 8 - workbooks for Hindi, English, Mathematics, Science & Social Science were developed. All those involved in the project collectively reviewed the content of all existing textbooks. The following emerged as **points of concern**:

Layout: Font size, colour usage, overall layout and printing quality were all felt to be areas of improvement in the textbooks. Therefore, these were addressed specifically in the development of the workbooks, so that a child would instinctively feel drawn to picking up such a book from a pile.

Selection of information: Selecting, pitching and presenting the information in a manner that would be age appropriate was inadequately addressed in the textbooks. Very often, there were too many concepts introduced in a paragraph with very little explanation on what each of them meant. Concepts, in the workbook were, therefore prioritized according to age, prior learning and conceptual linkages in subsequent grades, so that a few core and essential concepts would be dealt with but in greater depth. Wherever needed, supplementary reading materials were provided to address the concept gap that was found in the textbooks.

Weeding out of inaccurate information: Alarmingly, there were a few factually incorrect information as well. This was addressed by checking and rechecking sources of information inserted in the workbooks, and in fact, the entire exercise brought out the need to do this while preparing any teaching learning resource.

Sequencing and organizing of content: An absence of concept mapping across each textbook, and across stages of learning was evident. Linkages between chapters were sorely missing, as were linkages across concepts...inter-disciplinary linkages were of course a far cry. So the workbooks were designed so as to allow for back-and-forth learning by the child, across concepts, subjects and levels, without expecting the child to know more than a certain minimum to proceed with the workbook.

Visual Appeal: When dealing with unfamiliar concepts like, for instance, volcanoes or earthquakes, it is vital that the pictures give as vivid an experience as possible, for every child is not likely to be familiar with these. Also, the pictures needed to be attractive and meaningful. This, too, was addressed in the workbooks that were developed.

Contextualisation of content to the learner’s own context: Folklore and familiar songs were used as part of contextualization, as were examples of local flora and fauna.

Since these workbooks were directed to the child, plenty of opportunities were provided for independent, peer and group learning, all independent of the teacher. This is not meant to imply that the teacher was left out, as clear, unambiguous and easy-to-follow instructions were given for teachers (as well as learners) to use the workbooks. In short, the entire resource was developed within the paradigm of both teacher and child being co-learners, and not ‘one teaching the other’.

Aanchal Chomal has been working with the Foundation for over 9 years. She heads the Institute for Assessment and Accreditation at Azim Premji School of Continuing Education and University Resource Centre. Her work involves developing frameworks, tools, processes and approaches for assessments with learners, teachers and teacher educators. She is a post graduate in Geography from Centre for Studies in Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and has graduated in Geography from Presidency College, Calcutta. She may be contacted at aanchal@azimpremjifoundation.org