

Focus on Pedagogical Renewal Process

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In April, gender coordinators from the DPEP I states: Assam, Haryana, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu had met in Bangalore with a two-part agenda: first to define their role within DPEP and the second to chalk out an agenda for the rest of the year.

This workshop was also the first quarterly meeting of gender coordinators. It provided an opportunity for participants to compare notes and learn from each other. This gathering defined the agenda for the August '96 workshop.

The second quarterly meeting of gender coordinators was held in Bhopal, on August 30.

Based on the issues identified by participants during the April meeting, it was decided to focus the Bhopal workshop on pedagogical renewal processes. The objectives of the meeting were to come up with:

- Ideas on how to integrate positive values, images and roles in texts and training material.
- Identify effective methods to use existing material in a gender-sensitive manner.
- Schedule gender reviews at state level.

Pedagogical renewal processes within DPEP are still being worked out particularly as it involves a range of areas. Training designs for all levels of educational administrators, teachers, headmasters need to be overhauled. New material is being developed for the ECE and alternative schooling programmes. This is all in addition to the efforts to develop child-friendly text books which then need to be made available to all schools and students on time.

This pedagogical improvement exercise is a move to overhaul the entire primary education delivery apparatus. The gender coordinators role in this exercise has been limited, the limits having been set both by organisational factors and technical constraints.

While all states are overhauling their in-service training design, some have begun work on re-doing the text books and developing other materials. Gender has been identified as a critical input into both areas. To understand why and to evolve methods to ensure there is integration of gender concerns in future exercises, the Bhopal meeting focused on two seemingly parallel, but in reality complementary, concerns. The first how to conduct a gender review of text-books and integrate gender concerns in training design. The second how to use existing gender-neutral or gender-insensitive material in a girl child friendly manner. The final part of the exercise would examine how to link the process of text book improvement to teacher training design and classroom practices.

Frame for Reference

Textbooks and other learning materials are developed centrally in each state. Efforts are being made to rewrite text books from a gender perspective. Until recently the idea and ideal of femininity as defined in content and illustrations is of women and girls as relative creatures who are inferior and subordinate to men. The female gender is identified with domesticity. The ideal of femininity is of the perfect daughter, sister, wife and mother.

Some states have brought out textbooks and workbooks which are not only gender bias free but also portray boys and girls in shared roles and women excelling in different walks of life, says one study, titled 'From Girl Child to Person/ However, until all text books are reviewed and the changes incorporated, teachers have to use existing materials which continue to present women and girls very feebly, in stereotyped roles and with negative attributes. As the study points out, the text books are likely to have the following flaws:

- Predominance of male characters and male authors.
- Men in lead roles and few women shown in service roles that consist of either menial work or assisting roles.
- Women are seen as passive, timid, disorganised, weak, silly. The qualities attributed to men are courage, bravery, initiative and resourcefulness.
- Visuals show a majority of males in action, as teachers, as leaders, doctors, farmers, women appear as housewives, mothers, maids, seldom as factory workers, pilots or officers.

The Workshop

Representatives from Assam, Haryana and Karnataka joined gender coordinators from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, in Bhopal. Tamil

Nadu and Kerala were not represented. There were three resource persons invited to share their experience. Dr Gayatri Devi Dutt, Deputy Director, DSERT, Bangalore shared the issues raised and the solutions evolved in Karnataka. Dr. Ila Pathak is involved with the Ahmedabad-based women's group, AWAG. The group has done two gender reviews of the primary school text books of Gujarat. Ms. Rashmi Paliwal is working with the Hoshangabad programme of the NGO, Eklavya.

The day-long programme involved taking participants through a four part exercise: The first a review of states experience with texts and teacher training; second comparing this to and learning from the

Impact of Gender Insensitive Material

.Boys consider themselves superior

- *Girls feel inferior*

. Girls photo should not be shown

. Role identification: No scope

. Girls develop wrong attitudes

. Does not empower girls

. Teachers internalise this bias

experience of a non-governmental groups which took up gender reviews on a voluntary basis; the third part of the exercise, learning how to make gender-aware material. The final session of the day reviewed ways to measure progress made to date in DPEP I states. For this a series of formats were shared.

The Experience of Karnataka

The meeting began with a presentation of the outcomes of last meeting. This set the stage for the first presentation. Karnataka, one of the DPEP I states, has made integration of gender in pedagogical renewal processes a priority. They have examined Classes 1-3 textbooks from a gender perspective. Dr. Dutt shared the experience of the last two years. The gender review identified many blatant and some subtle negative values being promoted through texts and visuals. Thus head count of visuals showed that there were 12 pictures of girls against 88 pictures of boys.

Trying to redress the balance highlighted many unforeseen problems, like the inability of artists to give character to a girls face. With boys, the figures and indeed the facial expressions proved to be no problem for illustrators.

There were the biases of text-book writers and others on committees. Thus, when it was suggested that both girls and boys could be sent to buy oranges and grapes in a maths problem, writers turned round and accused the proposer of promoting consumerism among young children.

Other problems had to be dealt with and compromises made. Thus though there was a desire to make the books entirely gender-aware, in the interests of preserving the language, a gender neutral approach had to be adopted in many sections.

As the process picked up pace, the team learnt new approaches to deal with concerns. One of the first was to ensure there is a gender specialist in every committee. This ensures that there are a number of check points and correctives can be slotted. It was one such committee member who pointed out that though the names of children had been changed in one chapter to include girls, all the pronouns remain male. This was corrected.

Then with most writers and illustrators coming from urban areas, the content and sketches also reflect this bias. A strategic alliance was forged between the two issues. Correcting the urban bias has been much easier and is often used with gender to persuade teams to agree to changes.

Finding gender-aware illustrators however remains difficult and while it is now easier to get gender-aware material into text, changing illustrations is a concern. Thus in a story about a girl who helps a king, the illustration has the king, in the forefront with a white charger and his attendants and in one corner stands the girl. It was suggested that as the story is about the girl who helps the king, she should be given more prominence. While the I am reluctantly agreed, when the chapter was finalised, the original picture was retained.

Getting people to understand the importance of each sentence and picture is critical, as is ensuring that there is a gender specialist participating actively at every stage of the text-books renewal process from content to production.

Relating this experience to the efforts to integrate a gender perspective in the training design, Dr. Dutt said that in the teachers guide, there is a separate section which introduces the idea of gender and includes suggestions on how to ensure classrooms are gender-aware. This includes tips on attitude and behaviour. Thus teachers are actively discouraged from asking girls to sweep the classroom.

In addition there is a sensitisation programme for all teachers. This three to five day programme, introduces them to both the concepts and practices of gender in all aspects of daily life.

Evaluating her experience, Dr. Dutt suggested that there is need for more material in regional languages. Karnataka is planning to document its experience with pedagogical improvement practices during the past 20 months. She however felt that despite the training, teachers have not internalised gender concerns. There is a plan to have an advanced gender sensitisation programme for all teachers, particularly as the present training does not help them deal with new situations. This is also a problem with trainers. While they grasp and can translate the ideas for teachers at different levels, if participants question them or present specific classroom situations they are unable to deal with it.

In the discussion which followed, Dr. Da Pathak, who has completed a series of gender reviews of Gujarati text-books for primary and secondary classes suggested that perhaps there is a need to differentiate training programmes. The first set could be divided into two parts: for women and men separately, while the advanced training could be for mixed groups.

Learnings from the Gender Review of Gujarati Text Books

Ms Pathak detailed the experience of a women's group AWAG. This group included some from the university, others from the newspapers and NGOs. They began reviewing text-books out of concern and a research interest. This exercise received support from the authorities for some time but later the support dried up.

The principles on the basis of which Gujarati text books were assessed are:

- Women should be treated as human beings
- The approach to women and men must be similar
- Text books should present equality of women with men.

In their review, the group of seven women, of whom four were teachers found that women are usually not named in the texts. They are known as women Ramu's mother the farmer's wife, the girl from the next village.

In other cases, the stories advocated values which the group found unsuitable. One of the controversial stories they asked to be removed was of Rani Karmavati, who began the widely practised custom of Rakhi: a festival which celebrates the bond between brother and sister. Karmavati, the story goes, appealed to Emperor Humayun to save the kingdom, under threat from Nadir Shah's troops. By the time Humayun gets there, Karmavati has committed johar, a form of suicide,

widely practised by Rajput women when enemy troops are entering a city. Objecting to the story on the grounds that it celebrates *johar*, the team asked for and got the story replaced with a local tale of a warrior queen of Saurashtra.

Similarly, the team also objected to the inclusion of the story of Hadi Rani, another warrior queen, who cut off her own head, to send a reluctant husband into battle. The issues raised in both cases, was that its not enough to show brave women, its also important to promote progressive values.

The attitude of the authors/editors could be summarily stated by pointing out how a boy and girl are treated in the Gujarati language textbook for Std. I.

There is a description of how a boy spends his morning. In the same textbook a girl describes her day.

It was morning.

I got up early.

I started getting ready.

I brushed my teeth and washed my face.

I combed my hair after taking bath.

Mother gave me snacks.

I started for school.

I met my friend on the way

We went to school together.

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My name is Sarita

This is my mother

My mothers name is Savitabahen.

My father's name is Manubhai.

In that cradle there is my younger brother.

His name is Vijay.

He is sleeping.

I get up early every morning.

I take bath and get ready.

Then I sit down to study.

I play with Vijay (Meaning thereby: I look after Vijay).

I help my mother in housework.

The difference in the routine of a son and a daughter is quite obvious in the example. A daughter shared household chores and baby care with the mother. A son does not.

That is what the makers of the textbooks appear to think to be right thing. They have not expressed any vision of equality for girls. An illustration in the books shows: A Boy flies the kite, while the sister is seen holding the thread.

Much of these efforts Ms. Pathak pointed out require the intervention of at least two people, committed to the task on hand. She cited the example of Dr. Dutt who had found that while she was in the room with artists and writers, the gender issue remained on the agenda. When she was unable to attend, gender-blind or blatantly sexist texts and illustrations would pass through. Similarly, while the individual at the helm was interested in gender concerns, it received priority in Gujarati text-books and later the issue was no longer on the agenda.

Teaching Social Science: Subtle Intergration of Gender Concerns

The discussion on the Gujarati textbook review and the search for supporters at the level of policy makers naturally led to the Eklavya experience with text-book production. It was specifically decided to ask the team working on social science text books to talk with the group as they would be able to show how skills development and concept clarity go hand in hand. In primary schools, participants pointed out, there is more emphasis on skill development rather than on getting children to discover new methods or approaches.

Ms Rashmi Paliwal, who works in Hoshangabad with the non-governmental agency, Eklavya, pointed out that the first step in their text-book production exercise is learning that a text-book is not the sole source of information for children. They have and also need other materials, to provide variety and to grasp the issue. While supplementary materials can be prepared, existing textual and non-textual materials can also be used.

She outlined the main steps which need to be taken, the first being to ensure the legitimacy of proposed change is established. This needs to go in tandem with the requisite policy direction. There is however need to understand that even with support from the policy-makers, resistance will be encountered. For though curriculum can change through directive, text-books remain the same. Teachers are often asked to teach a new curriculum with the new text-books. Involving teachers, both as trainers and as reviewers of text-books is one part of the exercise. The second is to encourage teachers to ask questions. For a teacher who asks questions will usually encourage students to raise queries.

The third is to ensure that while preparing text-books, the emphasis would be on reality-orientation and on discovery-based approaches. Thus examples used in the texts and in pictures are of different realities, most close to the reality of the children themselves. This of course means that examples need to be concretised and there should be a conscious attempt to avoid generalisations.

Finally to help children understand social realities: the text and illustrations must make reality meaningful, relevant, involving and relate it to the children's world. In curriculum terms, this has meant that while discussing industrialisation, the children are told not just about the Bhakra Dam and the first steel plant, but also about home-based work and informal sector industries and organisations.

Conclusion

In the discussion that followed, participants talked about the need for more research in the area of gender-aware pedagogical renewal. From Madhya Pradesh, participants suggested that there was need to examine the MLLs from a gender perspective. Also while there is an urgency to implement new strategies, the same emphasis on concurrent monitoring is absent.

Madhya Pradesh has the largest programme, with 19 of the 45 districts coming within the ambit of DPEP. The state has gender coordinators in place in all districts and has also established a gender core group in each district. To benefit from the coordinators in place in all districts and has also established a gender core group in each district. To benefit from the coordinators meeting, the state team asked that all participants visit a neighbouring district and provide ideas on how to catalyse field activities. The day after the meeting, field visit to three villages of district Raisen was arranged. Raisen is one of the 3 districts in Madhya Pradesh where the Mahila Samakhya Programme has been launched.

In Maharashtra also, while there have been efforts to integrate a gender perspective, it has been limited to changes in illustrations and some content changes. What is required is some method to judge progress in implementation and also at the level of understanding and gender sensitiveness among textbook writers and illustrators.

During the free-wheeling discussion it emerged that the women's voice within the system of pedagogical renewal was limited by the same structural factors which served male interests in the wider world.

The position of women was restricted not on the basis of their worth as employees but upon what was perceived as women's role. One of the ways of combating this to make more visible the gender components of each activity.

Ways to monitor progress from a gender perspective were discussed. Training alone cannot change gender relations and ensure that women and girls get a better deal. What it can do is enable both women and men and trainees to question existing classroom practices and help them evolve new teaching-learning methods which are gender-aware.

Follow-Up

At State Level

- Initiate gender review of text-book renewal and teacher training processes.
- Work out frequent monitoring mechanisms to learn the impact on gender relations within the classroom.
- Chalk out plans to include gender resource group in pedagogical improvement process.

At National Level

- Initiate process to evolve monitoring indicators
- Assist state efforts to conduct gender reviews.