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Thesis title: Role of Teachers in Teaching Learning of EVS in Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Findings

The present study acknowledges that most classrooms are heterogeneous and culturally diverse. Its primary concern is how school teachers respond to this diversity through curricular mediation in Environmental Studies (EVS). This study resulted from a qualitative inquiry conducted at a co-educational MCD primary school in Daryaganj Delhi. Data collection spanned over an entire academic session including two distinct phases- (i) The observation phase, and (ii) The intervention phase. Following are the major findings-

- The NCERT's EVS textbooks (Looking Around) integrate content based on authentic human experiences and contextualised skills from diverse cultures. They reflect the diversity and richness of Indian culture through its content and promote the inclusion of children's cultural contexts and home experiences through varied learning experiences and activities.
- Findings from classroom observations indicate that the cultural backgrounds and beliefs of the teachers and their students played a significant role in determining interpersonal relations and interactions including peer dynamics among children. The teachers also possessed stereotyped cultural beliefs and prejudices towards students' backgrounds. They attributed low academic performance of their students to the families and cultural contexts, instead of school related factors projecting their deficit perspective towards their learners. Teachers also struggled

to realise the relevance of the multicultural aspects and portrayal of diversity in the EVS textbooks. There were systemic constraints that also led to the traditional classroom environment as reported by the teachers and revealed through my observations. Knowledge transmission appeared a preferred mode over construction of knowledge. Active and meaningful participation of learners in knowledge construction was missing. Teachers usually avoided critical discussions on sensitive issues, cultural stereotypes and social discrimination. Their cultural beliefs interacted with concept development, often reinforced stereotypes and prejudices concerning certain cultural practices.

- Teaching intervention provided a glimpse into children's perceptions of 'work'. Factors such as better earning potential, job security, social perceptions, gaining respect and power, and better working conditions compared to lower-paid jobs and manual labour influenced their preferences. They valued mainly the paid work by male family members over the household chores by females which they mainly viewed as female's routine responsibilities being the homemakers. Sessions also revealed children's notions about work related discrimination and stereotypes mainly for manual and low paid jobs like cleaning or labouring. The idea of fairness and inequality at work was still preliminary among children and needed much emphasis through sustained dialogue and critical debates. They identified issues related to work and workers at different workplaces, expressed concern for social justice & equality, and empathised with marginalized social groups.

This intervention explored opportunities for culturally responsive pedagogy within a routine classroom setting and leveraging its strengths to enhance learning for children. Many students who typically disengaged during regular classroom activities were actively participating and collaborating in the sessions. Based on my classroom observations and intervention experiences, I can suggest that EVS teachers should have an awareness and respect for their learners' cultural backgrounds.