

The Maze of A Map

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My students have passed the second grade and are in third grade this year. I have been working with them since they were in the final term of grade one. Government schools of Delhi follow NCERT textbooks in classes 1 and 2 for Mathematics, English and Hindi. In class 3, two more text books are added as a part of curriculum which are '*Aas-Paas*' for EVS and '*Meri Dilli*' for social studies. Since we live in Delhi region it is understandable that we should know about our state, therefore '*Meri Dilli*', which is prepared by SCERT, plays an important role in the curriculum.

Now my purpose of writing this article is not to negate the role of this book, but to understand its context and interaction with the children. Because when I opened the first lesson of '*Meri Dilli*', I was surprised to see that it begins with the map of Delhi. My students had developed an understanding of only some geometric shapes and their pattern up to the second grade. This made me feel that starting with the map of Delhi in the very first lesson was not a very natural thing! Somehow I was not comfortable with it. So I started looking for some links in the other textbooks of class three such as mathematics or *Aas-Paas*, through which the children could be led to the map of Delhi, because I was afraid that if I introduced them to the map straightaway then most of them would not understand it and further, due to fear, they would distance themselves from the very process of learning.

I found that link after scrutinising the textbook of mathematics in which the first lesson was '*Dekhen kidhar se*' (Perspectives) is based on looking at objects from different angles and drawing them. For example, if one looks at a car from front, back, side and top; different images/shapes can be seen. Based on this concept the children were given the opportunity to draw various things present in the classroom (water bottle, book, duster, toy, chair, etc.) from different angles. Later they were asked to draw these things from memory. After this they were asked the following question:

'If you grow wings and fly to the top of the class room, how will the class room look?'

I was not very confident before asking this question. Somewhere in my mind, there was a doubt. Was it too big a leap between drawing the pictures of the objects from different angles and asking them to draw the map of the classroom? I was aware of my doubts and made a few points for myself to work on, such as – draw the map by starting with the outer shape of the class room which was rectangular. Then go on to the other main things like doors, windows, almirah, blackboard etc. and discuss their position in the map and finally mark the small things like the switchboard, dustbin, desk and the children sitting there.

Having prepared myself thus, I did the above activity in class. All my doubts vanished when I saw that the children could easily identify the shape of the rectangular classroom. We were progressing stage by stage. The children's ideas and discussions were being put together on the blackboard as well so that they could understand the plan and the location of the objects on it. Gradually all the objects in the class were marked on the plan. What the children enjoyed the most was marking themselves on the map, one by one. Even later they were going to the blackboard again and again to tell me and their friends where they were marked in the plan. In the end, I asked them about my position when I was standing near the board and drawing the plan and they could tell me that correctly. Finally the children drew the plan on the blackboard and highlighted themselves on it.

The Plan of the Classroom

This was the right point of time to end the day because the children were very enthusiastic and happy about the plan of the class. Also it would have been better if they were left with the task for the rest of the day, because then they would get enough time to assimilate the idea and the process of making it.

The next day when we discussed the plan again, one child asked me 'Why did not we mark the charts

that are put up the class in the plan?’ The other children agreed with the question - perhaps it was equally relevant to them also. Now the children wanted every single item or object of their class to be shown in the plan. This was the right time to discuss the difference between the plan and the purpose of drawing a map although I had not planned the discussion. Perhaps I underestimated the abilities of children, but it was really heartening to see that the children were ready to learn about it. So the purpose of map drawing was explained in a general way like this – ‘The picture shows all the objects of a place exactly as they are arranged, only their size becomes small. In a picture one can see the smallest and the biggest object. But in a map we show a place with a few important locations, roads and objects of that place. If we start marking each object in a map then there will not be any difference between a map and a picture’. But I could feel that even after this explanation the children had not understood it fully. So I asked them – ‘If you had to direct someone from the main gate of the school to your class, how would you do it?’ One girl answered – ‘I will ask them to climb up the staircase next to the hall. Then leave the class that they see first and the next one is ours.’ My next question was based on this answer. I asked her whether she had to tell about all the things that were there on the way to her class like charts etc.? The children answered in the negative. Now the children had understood the meaning of a plan.

The next step of this activity was to draw the map of our school. Before doing this the whole class visited the school. We saw all the classes, toilets, laboratories etc. situated on the ground floor. I especially drew their attention to the wall at the back which is a little slanting. The shape of our school is not rectangular, it like a quadrilateral. The three sides of it are quite straight but the wall at the back is like a trapezium. After the visit we came back to the class, discussed and drew the map of the school following the same procedure as that of drawing the map of the class room. This time, while drawing the map, I faced a problem in maintaining the ratio of the distance and the length of the walls as this was a map of a larger space. I tried my best to keep the exact ratio of the length of the walls and the size of the classes and the distance between them. But every time it was not possible. Still we made a casual or basic map of our school on the black board and the children drew it in their notebooks later.

The Next Step

The next activity for the children was to draw the plan of their homes for homework. To explain the basics of this activity and to provide a sample to the children, I drew the plan of my home and showed them the way to mark the objects kept there. Then I asked them to draw a plan of their home and bring it to the class.

Some of the children could complete the task while others could not. Some maps appeared haphazard but when they started explaining, these unrefined maps started looking beautiful and clear. Now the time had come to read the map given in lesson one ‘*Meri Dilli*’. I was glad to see that now children were trying to understand the map of Delhi and were able to understand its meaning.

Some of the questions that came to my mind during this experience are still bothering me. For example, why was it necessary to give the map of Delhi in the very first lesson of third grade? Does it meet the expectations of children’s age and cognitive maturity? According to what I have read and my experience, a third grader is 7-8 year old and is in concrete operational stage, as suggested by Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. The child at this age creates knowledge from tangible/concrete objects and experiences, but struggles with abstract ideas. So, understanding the map of Delhi demands an abstract thought process and cognition for which a 7-8 year old child is not ready.

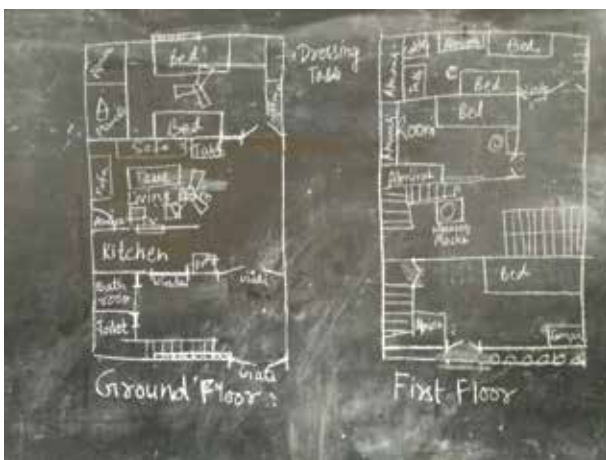
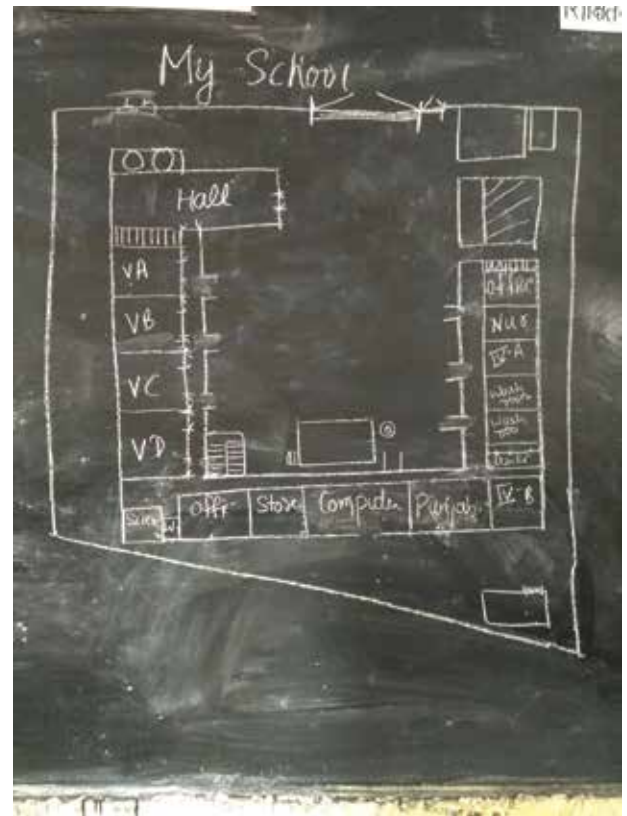
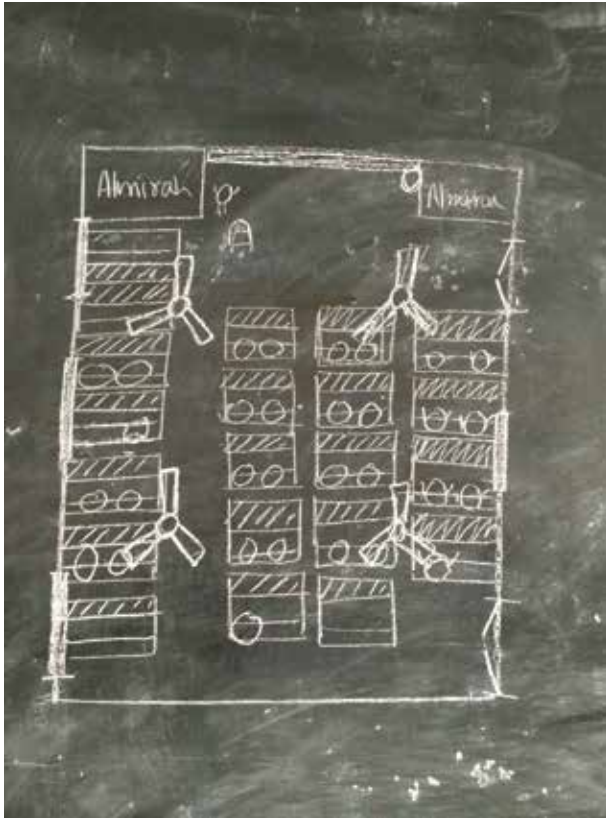
There were many other problems in the textbook ‘*Meri Dilli*’ apart from map of Delhi such as the language used in the lessons. Very complex and difficult words and sentences have been used in both Hindi and English medium books. For example, in second lesson we find phrases like ‘inhabitants of Delhi; knowledge of constructing the houses with concrete; till the nail stays, the dynasty will stand’ etc. In the name of ancient facts, a lot of information about many great kings and warriors of history has been poured out in a few pages without any context.

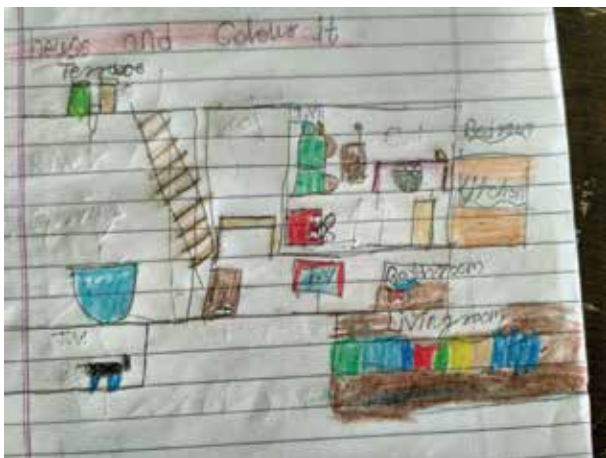
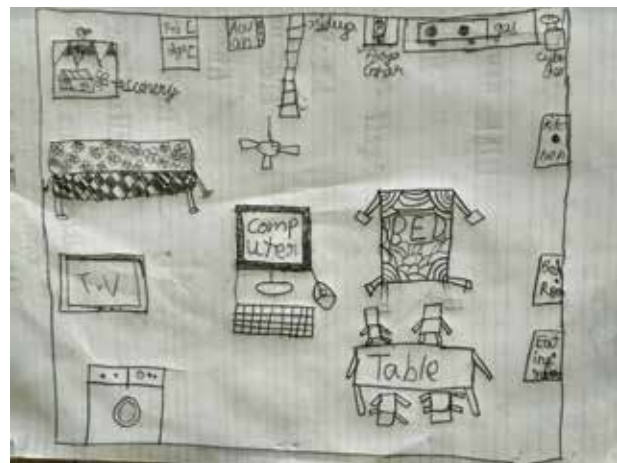
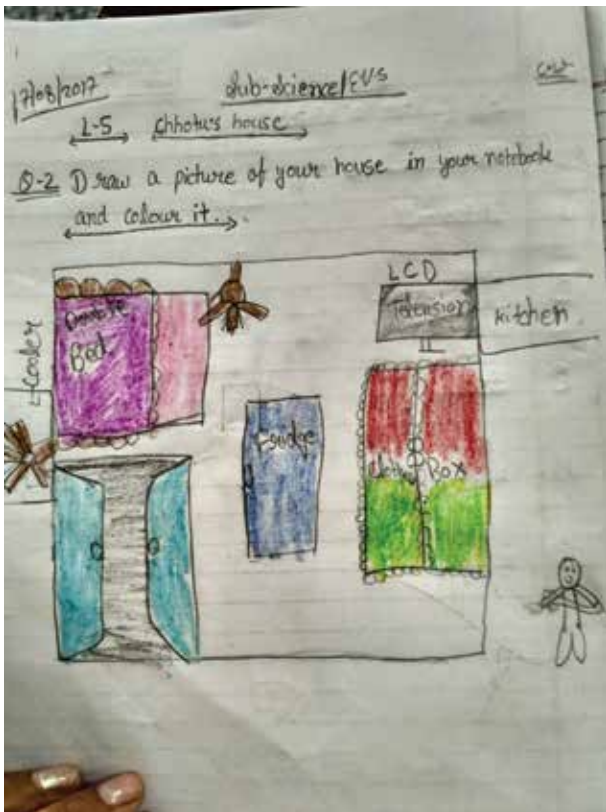
When compared with the other NCERT textbooks of class three, ‘*Meri Dilli*’ of SCERT appears to be dry, difficult and does not create opportunities to the children for exploration and thinking. All the lessons in the entire book are written in the same pattern in which a lot of information has been given in the beginning and then the questions related to that information are asked. Except a few questions,

all the others expect the children to copy the same information that is given in the lesson. There are not many activities that the children could do. So there is very little scope for the children to interact with the book.

One has to give a thought to whether we have any better option than textbooks as a resource.

Because according to NCF (2005) the textbook is just a resource and the teacher is free to use other resources also. But the issue gets stuck on the availability of other options, especially in government schools.





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