

Comprehensive Study Notes: Course-505, Block 1 - Importance of Teaching-Learning of EVS at Primary Level

1. Introduction to the Course and Block

1.1. Course Overview

These comprehensive study notes cover Block 1, titled "Importance of Teaching-Learning of EVS at Primary Level," from the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) Course-505, "Learning Environmental Studies at Primary Level." This course is designed to forge an integrated perspective on Environmental Studies, drawing insights from Science, Social Science, and Environmental Science to prepare learners to become sensitive and critical global citizens.

The complete course is structured into three main blocks, as summarized below:

Block Number	Block Title	Key Units Covered
Block 1	Importance of Teaching-Learning of EVS at primary level	Importance of Environment, Objectives and Scope of EVS, Pedagogical Considerations, Curricular Provisions.
Block 2	Curriculum and Pedagogy of EVS	Approaches for Teaching-Learning EVS, Methods of Teaching-Learning EVS, Planning Teaching and Learning of EVS, Resources and Materials for Teaching-Learning of EVS.
Block 3	Assessment of learning in EVS	Assessing Learning in EVS, Tools and Techniques for assessing learning in EVS, Using Assessment Results for Enhancement of Students' Understanding.

1.2. Block 1 Overview

This block focuses on the foundational principles of teaching Environmental Studies (EVS) at the primary level and is composed of the following four units:

1. Unit 1: Importance of Environment at the Early Stage of Learning
2. Unit 2: Objectives and Scope of Teaching-Learning EVS at the Primary Stage
3. Unit 3: Pedagogical Considerations of Teaching-Learning EVS
4. Unit 4: Curricular Provisions of EVS at the Primary Stage

General Course Objectives

This course is designed to enable you to:

- Develop understanding about the importance and concept of environment.
- Realise the importance of learning about environment at the Primary level of education.
- Visualise appropriate learning resources from the environment.
- Develop appropriate learning situations with a focus on interactive and experimental learning.

- Assess learning levels, learning difficulties of each child and design appropriate strategies for the future environment.

Specific Course Objectives

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Explain the origins and rationale for environmental studies at the primary stage of education.
- Describe the objectives and scope of EVS at the primary stage.
- Conduct real life-based hands-on activities in the school.
- Select and use appropriate learning resources from the environment.
- Carry out effective continuous and comprehensive learning assessment.

2. Unit 1: Importance of Environment at the Early Stage of Learning

2.1. Understanding the Environment

The word 'Environment' originates from the French word "**environner**," which means to encircle or surround. Literally, it connotes all that surrounds us. However, the concept is complex, and different people may have limited or partial understandings of it. Similar to the story of the blind men and an elephant, where each man's perception was limited to the part he touched, a **holistic picture** is necessary to truly understand the environment.

The environment is composed of three main interconnected components:

- **Natural Environment:** This includes all **a-biotic** (non-living) factors such as air, water, soil, and rocks, as well as **biotic** (living) elements like plants, animals, and micro-organisms. These components are interdependent, creating a variety of interactions between organisms and their environment.
- **Human-made Environment:** This component emerges from the natural environment and includes structures created by humans for their own requirements, such as roads, buildings, industries, and dams, which provide goods and services.
- **Socio-cultural Environment:** This is made up of social institutions, starting with the individual, family, and community, and extending to religious, educational, economic, and political institutions. It also includes the values, traditions, customs, arts, and history that are practiced and followed by communities.

The environment is best understood as a **comprehensive, composite, complex, and dynamic system**. Its sub-systems are in continuous interaction, which means the environment is never static; change is its fundamental characteristic.

2.2. The Role of Environment in Child Development

A child's awareness of the world begins with their own body and expands in ever-widening circles to their immediate surroundings: family, home, neighborhood, and school. Therefore, the **immediate environment serves as the primary context for a child's learning and development**. It provides the initial experiences with nature, seasons, social interactions, and cultural practices.

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) defines an "enabling environment" for children as one that is:

...rich in stimulation and experiences, that allows children to explore, experiment and freely express themselves, and one that is embedded in social relations that give them a sense of warmth, security and trust. (NCF 2005, p66)

2.3. Linking the Environment to the Child

Children are particularly vulnerable to environmental hazards due to their smaller physical size, immature organs, unique behaviors, and natural curiosity. At the same time, they can be dynamic and powerful forces for environmental protection and preservation. This critical link has been recognized in numerous international agreements.

- **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):** To combat disease and malnutrition within the framework of primary health care.
- **Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival Protection and Development of Children (1990):** To improve the environment by combating disease and malnutrition and promoting education.
- **The Habitat Agenda (1990):** Stated that the needs of children and youth, particularly with regard to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account.
- **Declaration of the Environment Leaders of the Eight on Children's Environmental Health (1997):** Recognized that children face significant threats from environmental hazards and that prevention of exposure is the most effective protection.
- **G8 Environment Ministers Communiqué (2001):** Called for policies to provide children with a safe environment, including during pre-natal and post-natal development.
- **The Berlin Commitment for Children of Europe and Central Asia (2001):** Pledged to protect all children from environmental threats and create child-respecting environments for play and learning.

In May 2002, a special session of the UN General Assembly adopted ten principles to make the world safer for children:

1. Leave no child out.
2. Put children first.
3. Care for every child.
4. Fight HIV/AIDS.
5. Stop harming and exploiting children.
6. Listen to children.
7. Educate every child.
8. Protect children from war.
9. Protect the earth for children.
10. Fight poverty: invest in children.

2.4. Valuing the Environment for Learning

The environment is an essential medium for learning, providing the necessary stimuli for children's physical and mental development. Children continuously explore, experience, and derive meaning from their surroundings. The NCF 2005 recognizes this, stating that the context in which learning takes place is of "**direct cognitive significance.**"

According to the NCF 2005, children's learning is guided by several key principles:

- All children are naturally motivated to learn and are capable of learning.
- Making meaning and developing the capacity for abstract thinking and reflection are the most important aspects of learning.
- Children learn in a variety of ways—through experience, making and doing things, experimentation, discussion, asking, listening, and reflecting.
- Learning takes place both inside and outside the school, and learning is enriched if these two arenas interact.

Exam Focus: Unit 1 Be prepared to define the 'environment' in a holistic manner, including its natural, human-made, and socio-cultural components. A key concept to explain is how the immediate environment serves as the primary context for a child's learning and development, as emphasized by NCF 2005.

3. Unit 2: Objectives and Scope of Teaching-Learning EVS at the Primary Stage

3.1. Why Teach EVS at the Primary Stage?

The National Policy on Education 1986 (NPE 1986) states that creating environmental consciousness is a paramount need that must begin with the child. At the primary level, Environmental Studies (EVS) is taught as an **integrated subject area** that draws insights from sciences, social studies, and environmental education. This approach is aimed at developing a **holistic perspective** of the environment in which the child lives.

Understand the four key reasons why EVS is significant at the primary stage:

- It **connects** children with their natural and human-made environment, helping them understand their dependence on its various components.
- It helps children develop a **holistic understanding** of their socio-cultural world, including family, community, and traditions.
- It develops an **appreciation for the interdependence** of all living things and the life support systems of the planet.
- It provides both **value education** (fostering environment-friendly attitudes) and **life-skill education** (learning to communicate, collaborate, and solve problems).

3.2. Objectives of EVS (as per NCF 2005)

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 outlines the core objectives of teaching EVS at the primary level. These objectives aim to foster a comprehensive and sensitive understanding of the environment.

The key objectives are:

- To train children to locate and comprehend relationships between the natural, social, and cultural environment.
- To develop an understanding based on observation and illustration, drawn from lived experiences and physical, biological, social, and cultural aspects of life rather than abstractions.
- To nurture the curiosity and creativity of the child, particularly in relation to the natural environment (including artifacts and people).
- To develop an awareness about environmental issues.
- To engage the child in exploratory and hands-on activities to acquire basic cognitive and psychomotor skills (e.g., observation, classification, inference).
- To create cognitive capacity and resourcefulness to make the child curious about social phenomena, starting with the family and moving to wider spaces.
- To emphasise design and fabrication, estimation and measurement as prelude to the development of technological and quantitative skills at later stages.
- To be able to critically address gender concerns and issues of marginalisation and oppression with values of equality, justice, and respect for human dignity and rights.

3.3. Values Inherent in EVS

Knowledge about the environment alone does not guarantee positive action. It must be combined with environment-friendly attitudes and values. EVS aims to foster these values by helping children understand that humans are an integral part of a larger community of living organisms.

3.3.1. Indian Heritage and Environmental Values

India has a rich heritage of valuing the environment. As a teacher, understanding these foundational concepts helps contextualize the EVS curriculum's emphasis on interconnectedness and respect for nature.

- **'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam':** A fundamental value meaning "all that is on the Earth belongs to one single family." This underpins the EVS principle of interdependence.
- **Earth as "Mother":** The *Prithvi Sukta* of the Atharva Veda describes the Earth as a mother and all living beings as her children, fostering a sense of care and responsibility.
- **Harmony with Nature:** Philosophers like Rabindranath Tagore emphasized that education should not be divorced from nature. Mahatma Gandhi's famous quote encapsulates this ethic of sustainable use: **"Nature has everything for man's needs but not for his greed."**
- **"Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu":** A motto meaning "Let the entire world be happy," reflecting a universal concern for well-being.

EVS also fosters **aesthetic value** (the appreciation of nature's beauty) and **moral value**, which includes the principle of **inter-generational equity**—the responsibility to protect the environment for future generations.

3.3.2. The Earth Charter: A Global Ethic

The Earth Charter is an international declaration of principles for a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society. It encapsulates a global ethic of environmental stewardship, stating that the "protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust." It calls for living with reverence, gratitude, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

3.4. Scope of EVS

The scope of EVS at the primary level is organized around three broad principles. Your teaching should encompass all three:

- **Learning *about* the environment:** Acquiring knowledge and understanding of environmental concepts and processes.
- **Learning *through* the environment:** Using the environment as a medium for hands-on, experiential learning.
- **Learning *for* the environment:** Developing the values, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in environmental protection and conservation.

The scope of EVS is very wide, covering everything from using the local surroundings as a learning resource to promoting proactive conservation efforts. The content is designed to be spirally organized, progressing from the **known to the unknown** and from the **local to the global**.

Exam Focus: Unit 2 Be prepared to explain why EVS is taught as an integrated subject and to list the core objectives from NCF 2005. A strong answer would also connect these objectives to the inherent values in EVS, such as interdependence ('Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam') and inter-generational equity.

4. Unit 3: Pedagogical Considerations of Teaching-Learning EVS

As a future EVS teacher, it is critical to understand the five unique characteristics that differentiate this subject from others. Your pedagogical approach must be built upon this foundation.

4.1. Key Characteristics of EVS

1. **Composite Area:** EVS is a single, integrated study area. It draws learning experiences from multiple disciplines, including the physical, biological, social, and cultural dimensions, organized around themes like Food, Water, and Shelter.
2. **Contextual:** The content of EVS is highly contextual. Teaching examples and the understanding of environmental issues will differ based on the specific location, time, and community of the learners.
3. **Learner-Centred:** The focus is on the child's active participation in constructing knowledge, not on the passive reception of information from the teacher. Each child's unique perceptions and experiences form the foundation of learning.
4. **No Absolute Right or Wrong:** Many environmental issues are complex and do not have a single correct answer. The teacher's role is to encourage questioning, probing, and debate rather than providing definitive solutions.

5. **Values are Integral:** EVS places a strong emphasis on the affective domain, nurturing values such as respect for all life forms, appreciation of diversity, compassion, peace, and tolerance.

4.2. How Children Learn

Research into child development has established several key principles that directly inform EVS pedagogy.

- They learn differently from adults, often through non-linear and intuitive processes.
- They learn through real-life contexts and concrete experiences.
- They learn by doing, experimenting, asking questions, and reflecting on their actions.
- They learn from their immediate surroundings and environment.
- They actively construct and re-construct meaning from their experiences, a principle central to **Social Constructivism**.

4.3. Pedagogical Organization for Teaching EVS

Effective EVS transaction requires specific pedagogical strategies that align with how children learn and the nature of the subject.

1. **Use the Child's Environment as a Learning Laboratory:** The immediate school and community environment should be used as the primary resource for learning. This approach ensures that learning is seamless, relevant, and based on real-life experiences, which promotes long-term retention. This strategy directly addresses the course objective of helping students 'visualise appropriate learning resources from the environment'.
2. **Facilitate Exploration from 'Known to Unknown' and 'Concrete to Abstract':** New concepts should be introduced in relation to what the child already knows. For example, the abstract concept of 'Plants' can be introduced through the familiar and concrete theme of 'Food' (what plants we eat).
3. **Design Real-Life Based Learning:** Use locale-specific examples and situations to connect the information in the textbook with the child's own life and surroundings. This makes learning meaningful and contextual.
4. **Encourage Dialogues and Questioning:** Create opportunities for children to talk, discuss, and share their ideas. This helps them develop critical thinking skills, sensitivity to diverse viewpoints, and essential social skills like listening and cooperation.

The Teacher's Role

The role of the EVS teacher evolves from being a traditional 'provider of knowledge' to a 'facilitator' who guides learning. Ultimately, the teacher becomes a '**co-learner**,' exploring and discovering alongside the students, acknowledging that learning is a lifelong process for everyone.

4.4. The Thematic Syllabus Structure

A core principle of NCF 2005 is the move away from topic-based lists to an integrated thematic structure. The EVS syllabus for Classes III-V is woven around six common themes:

1. Family and Friends
 - 1.1 Relationships
 - 1.2 Work and Play
 - 1.3 Animals
 - 1.4 Plants
2. Food
3. Shelter
4. Water
5. Travel
6. Things We Make and Do

This syllabus "web" is designed to expand outward, starting from the child's immediate 'self' and progressing to family, neighborhood, community, country, and the world. The same themes are revisited each year with increasing complexity, demonstrating a spiral progression. The table below illustrates this with the theme of 'Food'.

Class III Topics	Class IV Topics	Class V Topics
Cooking, eating in the family, what we eat, what others eat.	How food is grown, different plants, how food reaches us.	Who grows food, hardships farmers face. It explores food spoilage and preservation. Changes in food habits and crops are analyzed through elders' experiences. 'Our mouth - tastes and even digests food' explains how saliva sweetens food. 'Food for plants?' introduces the idea of insect-eating plants.

Exam Focus: Unit 3 Be prepared to contrast EVS with traditional subjects by explaining its contextual, learner-centred, and value-integrated nature. You should also be able to describe the spiral progression of the syllabus using a specific theme like 'Food' as an example, and explain the teacher's evolving role from a 'provider of knowledge' to a 'facilitator' and 'co-learner'.

5. Unit 4: Curricular Provisions of EVS at the Primary Stage

5.1. The EVS Syllabus and Textbooks

The EVS textbooks, titled the "Looking Around" series, are designed based on the NCF 2005. They are intended to be one of many tools to support knowledge creation, not the sole source of information. The teacher and students are encouraged to use the textbook as a starting point for exploration and discovery.

The key features of the EVS textbooks include:

- **Title:** The title "Looking Around" emphasizes the process of learning through active observation and interaction with one's surroundings.

- **Content Organization:** The content is organized thematically around the six core themes, providing an integrated perspective rather than a fragmented, topic-based one.
- **Integration:** The books seamlessly integrate concepts from science and social science, along with social, cultural, and environmental issues.
- **Variety of Formats and Activities:** A wide range of formats (stories, poems, news reports) and activities (puzzles, crafts, experiments, map reading) are used to support different learning styles and foster multiple intelligences.
- **Dealing with Social Issues:** The textbooks introduce sensitive social topics like discrimination, dignity of labor, and differences in family structures, requiring teachers to facilitate discussions with empathy and sensitivity.

5.2. Going Beyond the Classroom

NCF 2005 recommends that children's school life must be linked with their life outside the school. The EVS textbooks are designed to facilitate this connection by including exercises and prompts that encourage children to:

- Talk to family members, especially elders, to gather information about the past and different perspectives. For example: "Find out from elders what games they played when they were children (Class III)." or "Talk to grandparents and find out... Did they have a toilet in their house? (Class IV)."
- Bring in and share their personal experiences, contexts, and ideas in the classroom.
- Observe, record, and investigate their own neighborhoods, using the community as a learning resource. For example: "Visit to a farm and writing a report on its environment (Class V)."

5.3. Challenges in Transacting EVS

While the EVS curriculum has many inherent strengths, teachers face several challenges in its effective transaction.

First, its inherent curricular strengths include:

- Thematic organization of content.
- Content drawn from the child's own environment.
- Focus on exploration, experience, and knowledge construction.
- Progression from local to global and known to unknown.
- Scope for children's creative expression.

Key challenges for teachers include:

- **Shifting from a Teacher-Centred to a Learner-Centred Approach:** Moving from direct instruction and rote learning to facilitating active knowledge construction by students. This represents the challenge of evolving from a 'provider of knowledge' to a 'facilitator' and 'co-learner'.

- **Contextualizing Learning:** Relating the content of the EVS curriculum to the real, diverse life situations and immediate environments of the learners.
- **Teaching Integrated Themes:** Moving beyond the boundaries of one's own subject specialization to help children synthesize multiple perspectives.
- **Implementing Dynamic Assessment:** Moving beyond simple recall-based tests to assess the process of learning, skill development, and understanding in diverse contexts.

The central challenge for the EVS teacher is to leverage the curriculum's inherent strengths (e.g., its thematic, real-world focus) to overcome the pedagogical hurdles of shifting from a teacher-centric to a learner-centric, integrated, and dynamic assessment model.

Exam Focus: Unit 4 A key exam topic is the challenge of implementing the EVS curriculum. Be ready to explain how the strengths of the curriculum (e.g., thematic integration, real-world connections) are designed to overcome traditional teaching hurdles, but also present new challenges for teachers, such as moving to a learner-centered approach and implementing dynamic assessment.