

A Reflective Analysis of NCERT Grade V Textbook-The World Around Us: Thematic Insights and Pedagogical Reflections

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Abstract:

This paper presents a reflective analysis of the NCERT Grade V textbook *The World Around Us*, focusing on its thematic orientations, pedagogical underpinnings, and curricular significance. The textbook, designed in alignment with the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 and resonating with the principles of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, offers a unique integration of environmental awareness, cultural heritage, scientific inquiry, and social responsibility. The analysis explores how the text engages learners with real-life contexts, stories, and narratives that foster experiential learning and critical thinking. It reflects on the strengths of the textbook in promoting inclusivity, interdisciplinary linkages, and values of sustainability, and critically examines possible challenges related to content load, regional representation, and scope for deeper inquiry-based engagement. The study highlights the thematic progression across units, including nature and environment, community and society, history and culture, health and hygiene, and scientific temper, and analyses their collective role in shaping holistic development of children. Drawing upon theoretical perspectives from constructivism, socio-cultural learning, and child-centered pedagogy, the paper situates the textbook as both a resource and a pedagogical tool. The reflections highlight its potential in nurturing eco-conscious citizens, empathetic learners, and critical thinkers, and suggests areas for curricular enrichment.

Keywords: NCERT Grade V Textbook-TWAU, Thematic Analysis, Pedagogical Reflections, Child-Centered Learning, Constructivist Pedagogy

Introduction

The NCERT Grade V textbook, *The World Around Us*, is designed as an integrated learning resource that blends environmental awareness with social, cultural, and scientific perspectives. Rooted in NCFSE 2023 and resonating with the principles of NEP 2020, it adopts a child-centered, activity-based approach to nurture curiosity and critical thinking. The text situates knowledge within everyday experiences, highlighting sustainability, community life, and inclusivity. As a pedagogical tool, it seeks to promote holistic development and responsible citizenship among young learners and offers a unique integration of environmental awareness, cultural heritage, scientific inquiry, and social responsibility. The book seeks to

transcend compartmentalized subject teaching by offering children a holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, and learner-centered understanding of their environment rooted in contextual learning; and cultivate sensitivity toward nature, respect for cultural diversity, and responsibility toward community life.

Inter-linkages with grade III & IV TWAU Textbooks

It is well known that the preparatory stage acts as a bridge between the foundational and the middle stages. The education provided during this stage builds upon the pedagogical approaches of the foundational stage, with gradual unfolding of concepts as the child progresses from Grade III to Grade V. In Grades III and IV, students have been familiarized with units of Our Communities, Life Around Us, Health and Well-being, Things Around Us and Our Environment. Grade V being the final year of the preparatory stage enables students for the middle stage in a complimentary manner. It lays a sound foundation for students in science and social science, so that they are ready to learn these subjects separately from middle stage. Therefore, Grade V students are familiarized with vibrant India, the important role of water through the example of river Godavari, health and well-being at home and school, what and how of different things around the students, and the environment on and around the planet Earth. Content and processes have been designed by keeping in view the age, experiences, interests and diversity of students. The textbook also carries a wide range of interesting facts about India's traditions, culture and achievements.

I. General features

1. **Title of the book:** Our Wondrous World- The World Around Us
2. **Class:** V
3. **School curricular stage (foundational/preparatory/middle/secondary):** Preparatory
4. **Name of the publisher/organisation:** National Council of Educational Research and Training (N.C.E.R.T.)
5. **Year of publication:** July 2025
6. **Total no. of pages:** 176
7. **Front cover page:** The front cover of the book captures a lively and colourful scene full of nature, community and discovery. Illustrations of children exploring outdoors, looking at plants, animals, landscapes or maps, alongside natural elements like water, sky, trees, animals can be seen. The title "Our Wondrous World" is prominently placed, thereby, giving a sense of wonder and curiosity. Overall, the cover aims to invite students into a journey of observing, learning, and engaging with the world around them.
8. **Price:** Rs. 65/-
9. **Quality of paper:** 80 GSM paper
10. **Quality of binding:** soft bound
11. **Text font size and its appropriateness for the learners:** Appropriate to the age of learners
12. **Layout and display of the book:** The book is organized in five thematic units, each comprising two chapters. The layout is designed to help young learners explore their environment, understand interrelationships, and develop a sense of responsibility towards nature and society. The book is child friendly, age appropriate and visually attractive.

II. Organization of the book

The book is thematically organized to help children connect classroom learning with their everyday experiences. It does weaves concepts from environmental studies, social science, and science into integrated chapters that encourage observation, questioning, and exploration. Each unit begins with relatable situations, stories, or activities drawn from children’s surroundings, followed by tasks, illustrations, and discussions that promote critical thinking and collaborative learning. The layout balances text with visuals, and the exercises are designed to be open-ended, interactive, and activity-based, fostering curiosity and holistic understanding rather than rote learning.

III. Details of Units and Chapters

There are five thematic units in the book with two chapters each exploring the subtopics progressively. Each unit begins with a brief ‘About the Unit’ section summarizing learning goals and context. A concept scheme along with a note for the teacher is given with a clear list of key concepts covered in each chapter. This gives focus to the teacher by giving insights on key concepts, pedagogical intent, and suggestions for class activities or discussions. It facilitates lesson planning and teaching targeted to the development of desired competencies and expected learning outcomes among the students. The details of units and chapters are given below:

1. Life Around Us
 - i. Water- The Essence of Life
 - ii. Journey of a River
2. Health and Well-being
 - iii. The Mystery of Food
 - iv. Our School-A Happy Place
3. Incredible India
 - v. Our Vibrant Country
 - vi. Some Unique Places
4. Things Around Us
 - vii. Energy- How Things Work
 - viii. Clothes-How Things are Made
5. Our Amazing Planet
 - ix. Rhythms of Nature
 - x. Earth- Our Shared Home

Theme wise analysis

The present review undertakes a theme-wise reflective analysis of the textbook, examining its philosophical underpinnings, cultural orientations, pedagogical strategies, and contemporary relevance. Seven

interrelated themes including the i) Foundations and Philosophical Orientations ii) Historical and Cultural Dimensions iii) Curriculum and Pedagogical Implications iv) Contemporary Issues and Challenges v) Integration of Knowledge and Practice for experiential understanding vi) Global Perspectives and Local Relevance vii) Reflections on Learner-Centric Approaches, form the framework of this analysis.

I. Foundations and Philosophical Orientations

The book is firmly rooted in the philosophical vision of the NCFSE 2023 and continues to resonate with the broader educational aspirations of NEP 2020. With a constructivist approach, the book views learning as an active process shaped by the child's lived experiences and emphasizes learning by doing, integrated knowledge systems, and child-centered pedagogy, encouraging learners to perceive their immediate surroundings as rich sources of knowledge.

The book prioritizes experiential engagement, stories, dialogues, and questions to provoke inquiry. Many examples including the one in Chapter 01: Water-The Essence of Life, on page no. 04, the book has given a "Discuss" section where it encourages students to think and reflect based on their own experiences. It has questions such as: "Do you think we can drink the water present in the oceans?" This is followed by a space for students to think and answer, prompting them to relate to what they've observed about freshwater and oceans rather than just memorizing a fact. This kind of interactive question embedded within the narrative encourages experiential engagement that students must reflect on real-life contexts of water and reason through answers. This aligns with John Dewey's pragmatism, where knowledge is not an end in itself but a tool for navigating and transforming one's environment.

The textbook also embodies Gandhian ideals of simplicity, self-reliance, and harmony with nature, subtly weaving moral and ethical sensibilities into environmental learning. With reference to the traditional and local knowledge reflecting simplicity, the textbook shows how traditional ways of life and resource use are portrayed through stories and real-life contexts that emphasize simple living and local resourcefulness (core Gandhian values). For example, in chapter-06: Some Unique Places, students read about communities such as those in Northeast India, where people depend on local forests for crafts like weaving and use traditional methods tied to their natural surroundings. Their lifestyle demonstrates simple, sustainable living closely connected to nature and community practices, rather than high-consumption industrial lifestyles.

Philosophically, the book attempts to democratize knowledge, recognizing diversity in learners' cultural backgrounds. This orientation not only humanizes learning but also situates education within the larger project of nation-building, where children are seen as future citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to sustainable and inclusive societies. In chapter-05, our vibrant country, the textbook introduces students to India's cultural diversity by highlighting varied languages, clothing, festivals, dance, music, and national symbols, all familiar markers of local identities that contribute to a shared national identity. The chapter

explicitly encourages students to understand what makes India unique while also appreciating unity in diversity. Through this, children from different cultural backgrounds see their own traditions reflected in the text (e.g., local festivals, traditional dress, foods, music) alongside examples from other parts of the country. This approach helps learners feel included and respected, while also understanding the larger idea of being part of one nation, a key aspect of democratizing knowledge where education includes multiple voices and backgrounds. The chapter also incorporates the traditional Indian ideal of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” that is the world is one family as an underlying theme.

II. Historical and Cultural Dimensions

One of the strengths of the book is its integration of history, culture, and indigenous knowledge systems into the fabric of environmental studies. The text introduces learners to local traditions, folk practices, and community life, thereby situating environmental awareness within a cultural-historical framework. For example, lessons that deal with traditional water conservation practices, indigenous modes of farming, or stories about community cooperation highlight how cultural wisdom can coexist with modern scientific perspectives. For example, in chapter-02: Journey of a River, the river Godavari is presented autobiographically, with narrative elements that connect natural processes to human culture and history. The chapter explains how rivers have been central to settlement patterns, agriculture, community and economic life. This connects traditional community practices (living along river banks) with environmental awareness about water cycles and ecology. Here, children learn how traditional communities respect and depend on river systems, combining cultural understanding with scientific concepts of river flow and ecology.

Through a powerful pedagogical strategy, the book bridges the past and the present, and encourages learners to respect cultural continuity while remaining open to innovation thereby, affirming the NEP 2020’s emphasis on rootedness in Indian traditions alongside global outlooks. By including narratives of diverse communities including tribal lifestyles, rural occupations, or urban livelihoods, the text fosters pluralism and inclusivity, essential for nurturing social cohesion in a multicultural nation like India. Chapter-05: Our Vibrant Country, celebrates India’s cultural pluralism by giving references to different languages, foods, clothing styles, festivals, and customs across various regions of the country. Activities also encourage children to share their own cultural practices with classmates. Here, children see their own identities reflected in the textbook while learning about others, fostering mutual respect and unity in diversity, a cornerstone of nation-building.

III. Curriculum and Pedagogical Implications

The curricular design of the book adopts an interdisciplinary approach by organically linking the concepts from science, social studies, health education, and environmental awareness, and encourages a holistic

vision of the world. Units on water, food, health, Indian places, energy, clothes and nature exemplify this integrated framework, where science merges with culture, and environmental awareness intersects with social responsibility.

Pedagogically, the text promotes activity-based learning by promoting experiments and activities at various places. For example, in chapter-07: Energy-How Things Work, an activity of ‘Blowing a Balloon to Observe Force and Movement’, asks learners to blow up a balloon, hold it tightly, and then release it to observe what happens. When the air rushes out, it pushes the balloon forward, showing how energy in the form of moving air can cause motion. The text then suggests an extension of this activity by attaching the balloon to a straw and string to make a simple “air rocket” and observing how it travels along the string when released. Such activities encourage divergent thinking, inviting children to share their voices rather than conform to a single “correct” answer.

Therefore, from a curricular perspective, the textbook stands as an important tool with integrated pedagogy, but its transformative potential depends on how faithfully educators actualize its spirit in real classrooms. This highlights the critical role of teacher education in bridging curricular vision with pedagogical reality.

IV. Contemporary Issues and Challenges

The book situates learning within the framework of contemporary challenges. Issues such as environmental degradation, health and hygiene, gender equity, and social responsibility appear recurrently, encouraging children to see themselves as active participants in addressing real-world problems. It positions several contemporary issues and challenges by anchoring learning in children’s everyday realities and sensitizes them to concerns such as energy use and conservation, environmental degradation, changing patterns of work, community interdependence, and responsible use of resources. Through discussions on sources of energy, waste, water use, and human activities, the text highlights the growing challenges of sustainability and the impact of human actions on the natural and social environment. At the same time, it draws attention to social issues such as the dignity of labour, diversity of livelihoods, and cooperation within communities. Rather than presenting these issues as abstract problems, the textbook frames them through familiar contexts, encouraging learners to observe, question, and reflect on their surroundings. In doing so, it helps children develop early awareness of contemporary societal and environmental challenges while fostering values of responsibility, empathy, and informed citizenship. For example, in chapter 4: Our School–A Happy Place, the textbook engages learners with issues of environmental cleanliness, waste management, water conservation, and school safety. Here, students are encouraged to observe their own school environment, identify problems like waste accumulation, leaking taps, or lack of greenery, and suggest improvements. They work in groups as ‘Waste Warriors’ to study waste segregation and ‘Water Watchers’ to notice water wastage and propose ways to conserve it. This activity not only makes children aware of

waste management and water conservation but also invites them to think critically and participate in solutions within their immediate context. Such exercises build sensitivity to environmental stewardship and social responsibility among learners by linking textbook concepts to real challenges in their school community.

V. Integration of Knowledge and Practice

The integration of theory with practice is a defining strength of the book which consistently encourages learners to connect classroom learning with their immediate environment. Activities such as given in chapter-10: Earth-Our Shared Home, include the segment where students are asked to write their own address (including house number, street, town/city, district, state and country) and then use a globe to locate India and see how land and water bodies are arranged on Earth. This task bridges abstract geographical concepts with the child's real world — encouraging them to connect what they learn about the planet with their own place of residence and physical surroundings. By relating map skills and the concept of Earth's surface directly to their address and locality, learners explore geography through personal experiences.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this integration is both practical and transformative as children, here, are not only recipients of knowledge but also investigators, co-creators, and problem-solvers. Such an approach reflects experiential learning approaches advocated by thinkers like Kolb and Dewey, who emphasized the cyclical process of doing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and applying. However, the success of this integration depends mainly on contextual factors. The review suggests that teacher innovation and community participation become crucial in overcoming any possible barriers. By drawing upon local knowledge, stories, and resources, educators can ensure that the integration of knowledge and practice remains meaningful across diverse socio-economic contexts.

VI: Global Perspectives and Local Relevance

In an era of globalization, textbooks must balance the global and the local, and the book demonstrates an awareness of this imperative. It situates children's learning within local realities—family, community, neighborhood—while also linking them to broader global concerns such as environmental sustainability, technological change, and cultural exchange. For example, in chapter 10: Earth—Our Shared Home, the textbook situates children's understanding of their local surroundings within the larger global context of Earth as one interconnected system. Here, learners explore how natural phenomena such as seasonal changes, cycles of water, and patterns in nature are not just local events but part of Earth's global systems. They also encounter ideas about the importance of protecting the planet's resources and biodiversity, emphasizing that actions in their own community like saving water and reducing waste, are connected to global concerns of environmental sustainability. Therefore, this chapter helps children see their local experiences and responsibilities towards the global environmental challenges and the shared well-being of

the Earth as a whole. This is crucial for cultivating children, rooted in their own traditions yet prepared to participate in an interconnected world. The NEP 2020 vision of “global citizens rooted in India” resonates strongly with this thematic orientation.

VII. Reflections on Learner-Centric Approaches

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the book is in its consistent commitment to learner-centric pedagogy. The textbook’s structure with stories, dialogues, open-ended questions, and activities places the child at the center of the learning process. The approach is transformative because it empowers children to become active knowledge-seekers rather than passive recipients. The textbook also validates the lived experiences of learners, encouraging them to share their observations, ask questions, and value their community’s wisdom. Such pedagogy facilitates children’s progress through guided participation and collaborative exploration.

At the same time, it is important to understand that learner-centric approaches require a supportive ecosystem. Therefore, teachers must shift roles from knowledge-deliverers to facilitators, parents must appreciate exploratory learning, and assessment practices must value creativity over memorization. Without systemic changes, the learner-centric design of the textbook may remain underutilized. Thus, the curriculum reform must be accompanied by teacher preparation, pedagogical innovation, and supportive assessment structures to realize the full promise of child-centered education.

Concluding Remarks and Note for Teachers

Overall, the book embodies the curricular vision of NCFSE 2023 and aligns closely with the principles of NEP 2020. Conceived as an integrated learning resource, the textbook brings together environmental, social, cultural, and scientific perspectives to enable learners to develop a holistic understanding of their surroundings. Moving away from fragmented, subject-bound instruction, it situates learning within children’s everyday experiences, thereby fostering curiosity, reflection, and critical thinking.

Pedagogically, the textbook follows a child-centred, constructivist approach that promotes learning through experience, dialogue, and inquiry. Through stories, illustrations, open-ended questions, and activity-based tasks rooted in everyday contexts, learners actively construct understanding. Teachers are positioned as facilitators who guide discussions, support meaning-making, and value diverse perspectives rather than fixed answers.

A significant strength of the book lies in its meaningful integration of cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge systems, and community life into environmental learning. By integrating traditional practices, regional variations, and collective responsibilities, the text nurtures respect for pluralism, social cohesion,

and cultural rootedness. Contemporary concerns such as sustainability, health and hygiene, waste management, and environmental conservation are woven into child-accessible narratives, aligning classroom learning with global priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals and fostering a sense of responsibility among young learners. It is not merely a pedagogical resource but a cultural and educational document that aspires to nurture reflective, empathetic, and responsible learners. Its true value lies not only in its content but in how it is enacted within classrooms, communities, and the everyday lives of children. The challenge and the opportunity for educators is to translate its vision into lived practice, ensuring that every learner meaningfully engages with and understands “the world around us.”

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