

DEVELOPMENTS IN ASSESSMENT: A PERSPECTIVE

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These days there has been a lot of debate in schools over Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). Earlier methods of assessment have been considered by some to be ineffective and that the entire procedure has got entangled in a system of examination upon which everything depends. The earlier systems of assessments were not able to show students in what ways their learning had been instrumental in changing attitudes. Nor were they able to indicate to guardians what their children knew or did not know.

Today, assessment has taken a different turn. So far, it has been able to display only what a child did not know. Exams have not been able to show the extent of a child's knowledge and how far she has progressed. This is totally contrary to principles of child psychology. Somehow, there is a popular idea that an examination's value lies in the degree of fear it can create in a child's mind. This is the idea that has taken root in popular imagination. However, the picture has now changed. We are now at a juncture where we are looking at assessment differently.

The goals of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 are there in front of us. The NCF has taken note of the fact that assessment has so far been based on apprehension when it should not be so. The aim of assessment should not be to repress a child through these methods. To assign to children labels such as 'stupid and slow' or 'bright and clever' and thereby put them down, contradicts the basic tenets of education.

While the RTE, on one hand, wants every child to be brought under the umbrella of education, on

the other hand, it talks about Class 5 examinations as being remedial. It wants to completely root out old practices and create an educational system which adds strength to children's learning capacities. The RTE specifically states that emphasis must be laid on the holistic growth of children by nurturing both their mental and physical attributes by maximizing their knowledge and understanding.

If we are really interested in increasing the capabilities of children, then we have to prepare teachers for the change. An institution can be called capable of imparting education only if the students are able – and show they are able – to gain knowledge. Teachers must be given opportunities to learn and constantly update their knowledge. The government has created multiple ways by which teachers and students can remain abreast of the latest trends – Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Zilla Education Authorities, Cluster Resource Centres (CRC), to name a few. Heads of schools are in contact with all these agencies.

The underlying principle of CCE is that all stress and tension should be removed from testing and teachers should get opportunities to evaluate their children on varied criteria.

The question arises: how can a teacher be sure that he or she has assessed all the aspects of a child's learning and, therefore, progressing? CCE also raises another question – if a child cannot be deemed as having failed, what is the goal of the educational system? Why should they go through the system if their progress cannot be evaluated? This question has given rise to the view that

learning is only possible if it is followed up with assessment. This view is not wholly right: learning is only possible in nurturing atmospheres, rather than in stressful ones. There is also another argument put forth and that is, if students do not become familiar with the examination system in school, how will they face competitive examinations in later life?

The idea of continuous evaluation is that it is an on-going process which enables the teacher to keep a check on not only what has been taught but also on what has been learnt. This provides feedback to teachers to make sure that learning has taken place at the conceptual stage. Emphasis has to be placed on concept learning within the classroom itself. For example, it is important to know whether reading and writing skills have been learnt early as these two are the very skills which are the foundation of further learning. It is therefore very important for a teacher to be sure of her students' skills. Teachers of the higher classes will have to make sure they are able to gauge their students by ensuring that practicals accompanying science classes adequately amplify concepts taught and making sure that children have understood them. Testing should reveal whether children have understood concepts and this will in turn show if they have been presented too early in a child's maturity cycle. Testing should be a holistic examination of whatever happens in the classroom. Another important aspect of learning is the level of discussions that take place in a classroom.

Present day learning has become too exam oriented and the testing methodologies do not fully assess the learner. All examinations seem to have a uniform methodology, regardless of whether, say, the subject is science or language. We will have to suit the examination with the subject as the NCF recommends. As far as language (Hindi) is concerned, appropriate assessment methods have to be designed. For example, it is not appropriate to judge reading with a written exam or writing task. Teachers will have to evaluate children's reading standards when they read in class. The methodology of making sure that every child gets a chance to read has to be ensured – a difficult task when some schools have 50-60 students in each class. One suggestion is to check reading standards by creating weekly or fortnightly tests for different groups and check their progress. The progress in writing skills can be checked by creating portfolios for each child in which could be kept samples of individual writing or drawing. Written work in notebooks is another means by which a child's work can be recorded.

A criticism of CCE is that it takes up a lot of the teacher's time. It has to be understood that CCE is part and parcel of the classroom activity and if done together with the lesson, will become an easier process. All in all, the teaching –learning experience is a vital one that should not be derailed at any point.

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