

EDITOR'S NOTE

Now, after seven long years of development of the National Curriculum Framework-2005, there is a need to look back and see what this framework suggests and to what extent we could understand its perspectives.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005 observes a deep disquiet about several aspects of our educational practice: (a) the school system is characterised by an inflexibility that makes it resistant to change; (b) learning has become an isolated activity, which does not encourage children to link knowledge with their lives in any organic or vital way; (c) schools promote a regime of thought that discourages creative thinking and insights; (d) what is presented in the name of learning and transmitted in the name of learning in schools bypasses vital dimensions of the human capacity to create new knowledge; (e) the “future” of the child has taken centre stage to the near exclusion of the child’s “present”, which is detrimental to the well-being of the child as well as the society and the nation.

In view of correcting this distortion of the education system where the stress is on memorising and not on understanding, the document proposes five guiding principles for curriculum development and the teaching-learning process.

- Connecting knowledge to life outside the school,
- Ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote methods,
- Enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than remain textbook centric,
- Making examinations more flexible and integrated into classroom life and,
- Nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

NCF highlights the need for recognising child as a natural learner and knowledge as the outcome of the child’s own activity. This is the context in which child’s construction of knowledge gains meaning. Construction of knowledge implies that curricula, syllabi and textbooks should enable the teacher in organising classroom experiences in consonance with the child’s nature and environment, and thus providing opportunities for learning to all children. Teaching should aim at enhancing children’s natural desire and strategies to learn. Knowledge needs to be distinguished from information, and teaching needs to be seen as a professional activity, not as coaching for memorisation or as transmission of facts. Activity is the heart of the child’s attempt to make sense of the world around him/

her. Therefore, every resource must be deployed to enable children to express themselves, handle objects, explore their natural and social milieu, and to grow up healthy.

In view of making school education an inclusive and meaningful experience for children, alongwith the efforts to move away from a textbook culture, curriculum must enable children to find their voices, nurture their curiosity—to do things, to ask questions and to pursue investigations, sharing and integrating their experiences with school knowledge—rather than their ability to reproduce textual knowledge. Learning to question received knowledge critically, whether it is found in a textbook or other literary sources in their own environments can be built by encouraging learners to comment, compare and think about elements that exist in their own environment. Learning tasks are to be designed to ensure that children will be encouraged to seek out knowledge from sites other than the textbook, in their own experience, in the experiences of people at home in the community, in libraries and other sites outside the school.

Learning also occurs through interaction with the environment around, things and people through language. Interaction with teachers, with peers as well as those who are older and young can open up many more rich learning possibilities. Learning in the company of others is a process of interacting with each other and also through the learning task at hand. This kind of learning is enriched when schools enroll children from different socio-economic background. Efforts are also required for preparing more learning resources for children, especially books and reference materials in regional languages, for school and teacher reference libraries, and for access to interactive rather than disseminative technologies. The NCF also focuses on the importance of multiplicity and fluidity of options at the senior secondary level, discouraging the entrenched tendency to place children in fixed streams, and limiting opportunities of children, especially from the rural areas.

Further, the thrust placed on systemic reforms in teacher education, work education and examination is quite visible. In view of changing role of teacher as per the shift in the perception of knowledge and learning, the document advocates for reformulated teacher education programme that places thrust on the active involvement of learners in the process of knowledge construction, shared context of learning, teacher as a facilitator of knowledge construction, multidisciplinary nature of knowledge of teacher education, integration of theory and practice dimensions, and engagement with issues and concerns of contemporary Indian society from a critical perspective. The document identifies productive work on pedagogic medium in school curriculum from pre-primary to senior secondary stages. It pointed out that vocational education and training to be conceived and implemented in a mission mode. Examination reform constitutes the most important systemic reform measure to be taken for curricular renewal and to find a remedy for the growing problem of psychological pressure that children and their parents feel, especially in Classes X and XII. NCF-2005 suggests a shift from

content-based testing to problem solving skills and towards shorter examinations as well as examination with a flexible time limit. The document also views that the prevailing typology of questions needs a radical change. Strategies to enable children to opt for different levels of attainment should be encouraged to overcome the present system of generalised classification into 'pass' and 'fail' categories.

In short, the curriculum framework initiative outlines a shift, to moving away from rote methods, connecting knowledge to life outside school, enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than remain textbook centric and making examination more flexible and integrated to classroom life. Reorienting the curriculum to this end must be among our highest priorities, informing the preparation of teachers, the annual plan of schools, the design of textbooks, learning materials and teaching plans, and assessment and examination pattern.

This issue of JIE includes articles on various aspects of education concerning access, equity, quality and sustainability.

Editorial committee of JIE feel that it is now time to reflect, to what extent we are successful in achieving the goals of NCF-2005. JIE invites research papers and reflective articles related to the implementation aspects of NCF-2005 from the stakeholders who are concerned with school education for the next issue which will be a special issue on curriculum concerns.

Academic Editor