

EPILOGUE

This framework for curriculum presents a vision of what is desirable for our children. It seeks to enable those who are involved with children and their schooling with the bases on which they can make choices that determine the curriculum. This provides an understanding of issues relating to children's learning, the nature of knowledge and the school as an institution. This approach to the curriculum draws attention to the importance of the school ethos and culture, the classroom practices of teachers, learning sites outside the school, and learning resources, as much as to the dimensions of the system that exert direct and indirect influence. The designing of large-scale curricular interventions, key activities such as the preparation of syllabus and textbooks, and examination reform must be consistent with each other and with educational aims for progress and improvement in the quality of education that we provide to our children. Hundreds of parents and teachers sent messages to NCERT in response to advertisements inviting public contributions for the National Curriculum Framework. One of these messages was from a Mumbai-based mother and teacher, Mrs. Neeta Mohla. She wrote:

Today as students my children face the same learning experiences as me 20 years ago. Everywhere around the world new methods of teaching and evaluation are being practised but our children continue to just copy exercises from the board, mug them up and reproduce them in the exam. If there are changes, they are for the worse. Children now have access to more information channels, yet more and more subjects and content are added to the school bag.

Computers, Moral Science etc., etc. recently became hit and G.K. was introduced as a new subject because the quiz show "Kaun Banega Crorepati..."

Our syllabus gets more massive and moves beyond the teaching capacity of the teachers, so they rush through the contents with tedious methodology. Students cannot meet the attention span requirement in the classrooms and either fail at comprehension or blank out into daydreaming. Newer topics of many different subjects are covered even before the previous ones have been chewed over. The burden of the syllabus is then passed on to the parents or tuition classes. Little children burdened with loads of education on their shoulders, trip from school to tuition classes, bypassing childhood. A section of students study harder and harder to beat each other for the top slot. Majority of the students are hounded by parents and teachers to study harder and become stressed, some requiring even clinical treatment. Only children who excel in the main subjects are regarded as successful. Children with accomplishments in other fields like sports and arts are underrated. They are earnestly discouraged from pursuing sports and hobbies as these don't count in the mark list. The curriculum and success dynamics demand that they shut out the real world with real experiences and lock themselves up in the world of books. Even sixth standard students must study four hours in addition to school hours if they want to enter into the race for marks.

When children in their developmental years spend more time in books than in the real world, they have every chance of becoming fragmented. Education ventures into a negative course. It splits a student's mind into two. A bookish worldview that he memorises without proper comprehension and the real world that is not in his/her control due to lack of focus. Take the example of a typical fourth standard child; he knows how stopping cattle grazing on hilltops can prevent soil erosion but he

cannot keep track of his/her notebooks and pencils. Ultimately he grows into an adult with a lot of knowledge sense but no common sense, a "padha likha bevakoof" (an educated fool). Good characters and personalities develop through focus on their development. Instead, a lot is taught which he cannot relate with his/her day-to-day life experiences and surroundings. For those who blank out into daydreaming education fails to make any impression, leaving them vulnerable to other dangerous influences. There is no support system for children in need of it. Parents today are just as stressed as their wards. A staggering 75 percent children preparing for Board Examinations today suffer from stress-related disorders.

Mrs. Neeta Mohla offers several concrete suggestions, some of which are the following :

- Balance what should be taught in favour of what can possibly be learnt. The structures of nature are architectural marvels wherein each part functions in coordination with the whole. The real challenge is to plan the curriculum so that it has the main elements that work to keep the broad objectives of education on course, and are well grounded in the realities of availabilities and constraints.
- Instead of a structure built to promote success for a select few, we must adopt a structure that engages participation in learning by all. The base should be sturdy so it lasts a whole life. The pillars should be broadened and redefined. New pillars like personality, character, physical fitness, creative and critical thinking should be

laid alongside the old academic pillars of maths, science, history, etc.

- Contents must be linked to the challenges of life and career at different stages. Students and teachers must be given the requisite time to focus on them. Acquisition of pure knowledge should be for the purpose of self-discovery of the child's own interest. This should be covered through alternative study methodology like project method and alternative evaluation models like open-book exams. We need only implant the seeds of every subject. Whole plants do not have to be hammered in. Education should inspire children to become learners for life.
- We must humanise education and make it relevant for the pursuit of the wide variety of human aptitudes. Alternative evaluation and grading models must be sought to encourage the diversity of talents among the learners. Achievers in sports, arts and crafts should get due recognition at par with academic achievers. Expanding the achievement list would definitely de-stress parents and children by spreading them out on to more tracks. The change to grading would shift the society's focus away from the social Darwinian implications of the curriculum.

Let us hope that curriculum, syllabi and textbook designers across the country will pay adequate and urgent attention to this mother's words.