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PIE IN THE SKY: ANDHRA PRADESH STATE CURRICULUM-2011

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ABSTRACT

The road less travelled is always bumpy, dusty and dangerous too. We can reach the destination only when there is clarity of vision and a great insight. The transition period of school education in India has been throwing many challenges to all its stakeholders. Alike the central and other state boards, Andhra Pradesh has also been facing many problems in implementing its new curriculum. The hasty decision to follow the CBSE pattern without reviewing the possibilities and a failure in conducting the follow up programs has doubled the challenges. The curriculum designed to provide quality and equal education for all in turn has faced a setback in its implementation at the ground level due to turning a blind eye to the physical environment, readiness of the teachers and the students. In a view to enhance English language skills, introduction of English from first standard and the same English text book for both English and Telugu mediums reversed its effort. The recent effort to reform the syllabus has been kept in abeyance. The system is losing its faith and trust among the stakeholders. The present paper attempts to throw light on how a system would fail if its definition to succeed is not strong enough.

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Teaching is no more transmission of facts; our children are no more store houses of information. Implementation of NCF-2005, drafted by NCERT on the recommendations of National Knowledge Commission for revamping, rejuvenating and reforming the school education in India, has become an uphill battle for the central and many state boards. NKC comments, "A robust, inclusive and high quality system of school education is essential for social and economic development.... School education must be relevant to the lives of the children..." The vision and mission of Indian school education reflects in NCF-2005 which initiated a shift in the system from rote memorization to knowledge construction, theoretical practices to practical approach, and stressful examinations to joyful learning. It has been a grueling task for the boards rooting the age old methods out, paving a way through pikes and pitfalls and dealing blows. Many teachers and students are frustrated to absorb the changes and are looking back to the olden days where there were minimum challenges. Transition from old to new is always a double edged sword. The constructive growth of an educational system depends on how well it responds to the needs of its pupils and how it bridges the gaps of

the system. If the gaps are widened, the system loses its faith and trust. The present paper is a critical review of the position of Andhra Pradesh in implementing a new curriculum.

The undivided Andhra Pradesh introduced Andhra Pradesh State Curriculum-2011 designed on par with the suggestions of NCF-2005 and CBSE model to enhance the quality in education, and develop the standards of the children. The people who were interested and connected to the education system welcomed and hoped that the prevalent problems of the system like low quality education, inferior standards of the children, rote memorization, stressful examination system, no practical approach of learning, etc. would be resolved with the new curriculum. Three years of its implementation has created many doubts and left a lot of confusion among all the stakeholders of the system.

The approach of the syllabus, the teaching methodologies, and the evaluation system are completely new to the environment. Rigorous training and practicum sessions with experts, supplementary materials to support the classroom teaching, and tools for new assessment system had to be provided in advance to show case the positive aspects of the new system and convince the teachers to come out from the clutches of the out dated methods. But teachers were forced to implement the new system all of a sudden without the proper knowledge of it. Since then some short term theoretical training sessions are being conducted every year in the middle of the academic year. The effectiveness and usefulness of these programs over the past three years can be better understood by this example. The old pattern exams were continued for the ninth and the tenth classes by the board in 2014-15 because the teachers were not ready to the new pattern. How can a teacher be serious if there is a mismatch between the teaching approach and the evaluation model?

Understanding the need for global communication, the two major changes, namely, introducing English from the first class and the same English textbook for both the English and the Telugu mediums at high school level had taken place. The textbooks were designed in a communicative teaching way to develop the pupils' expression. Pair and group activities and projects connecting to the real life were promoted to help them to construct the knowledge. As the beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, the effectiveness of the text books depends on how a teacher deals with it. The language proficiency of the teachers and the level of Telugu medium students were cold eyed. How can a teacher without fluency in English and specialized skills in communicative language teaching fulfill the objectives of the course? A random sample of 100 private and government English language teachers' opinions on the textbooks were collected by this writer before reviewing the scenario. They were satisfied with the textbook design but commonly felt the heaviness of the content. Especially the government teachers were hopeless in this regard. They expected supplementary materials and training cum workshop programs. The primary teachers have no special qualification in English. How can a teacher instantly switch over to the new system without any prior preparation? The teachers have disheartening experiences in implementing the new curriculum. Ultimately the students are being affected by the alarming gulf between the teacher and the curriculum.

It's not too late to mend the fences. A covalent bond exists between two atoms where there is sharing of electrons and it is further intensified by the association between them. The higher the association is, the stronger the bond is. On the other side a weak ionic bond happens when there is transfer of electrons from one atom to another atom. The bond that needs to build between the curriculum and the teachers should be covalent. The curriculum designers should step into the teachers' shoes, attend their problems, and convince them to take up new challenges for the well-being of our future citizens.

The ASER 2014 report tells that 57.7% of IV standard children can read at least I standard English textbook. But this percent is 68.7 in 2010 and 68.2 in 2011. More than 80 percent of VIII standard children were able to read II standard English textbook in 2010 and 2012. But that percent came down to 78 per cent in 2014. These statistics give us a clear picture how the new curriculum has been received by the teachers. The children who were in class four in 2010 might be in class seven or eight in 2014. When they came to high school, they had to follow the English text book meant for both the media. It is out of question how the teachers have been instructed to bridge the gap and what changes have been made to the new curriculum. Just for name-sake, a fifteen day readiness program is being conducted in the beginning of every academic year to fill the gap with the regular class work. It is imaginable how far a fifteen day program would work in

these conditions. A decline in the education standards is questioning the impact of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation on our system.

Formative assessment, a key component in CCE pattern is promoted by many countries for developing the learning standards. The successful strategies followed by Australia (Queensland), Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, Scotland ... are worth mentioning. Then why is there a decline in our system? The stories from CBSE and our state indicate that FA is misunderstood as evaluating a child regularly by conducting tests. Frequent tests and projects have put more burden on the teachers and the students. The new concept of integrating teaching and assessment, learning and assessment, learning while doing project, teaching through projects is not unveiled to the teachers. The dream of NCF-2005 'Learning without burden' and 'Learning to learn' will never be realized and our children will remain unscented flowers, unless the teachers are trained in meditative and reflective practices. Every delayed action in resolving the conflicts between the two major partners of the system, visibly the curriculum and the teachers, would cause an irreparable damage to lakhs of children.

Apart from all the above mentioned problems, the political intervention in altering the syllabus after the state division is unspeakable. Languages are not like social sciences which can give the knowledge of state borders, its capital, and its climatic conditions. NCF-2005 commends the cultural, social and linguistic diversity of our country. It rightly points out, "Language(s) enables the child to make connections between ideas, people and things, and relate to the world around. Stories, poems, songs and drama link children to their cultural heritage, and also give them an opportunity to understand their own experiences and to develop sensitivity to others. Language class offers some unique opportunities" Beauty and languages have no borders. Word goes that the Telangana government had initiated to remove the lessons from languages which reflect the Andhra culture and the lessons which were written by the Andhra writers. Tit for tat, following the steps of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh decided to remove non-local, difficult, repeated, irrelevant concepts from VI to X standard text books to reduce the content load. According to the recommendation of RMSA, the state boards are expected to complete the task of curriculum reforms in the very first year of program implementation. Department of Curriculum and Text books, a wing of SCERT has to monitor and follow up for the effective implementation of curriculum besides developing syllabus, text books, training manuals, and teacher handbooks. It has to research on curriculum, syllabus, and its implementation, provide necessary tools, find the gaps, and bring the reforms year to year. All the teachers and the children breathed a sigh of relief when the department started its work anyway, at least in the fourth year. It is clearly understood that the base for reforms is to localize the content of language text books and delete references to Telangana and its culture.

The aim of the new curriculum is to prepare our children to the global needs but here we don't want to study our neighboring state's culture. Don't we get a doubt? If we want to narrow and localize the content, then when do our children taste the other cultures? Aren't languages a rich source to expand their horizon of imagination and creativity? 'Our World Through English' a series of English text books from the first standard to the tenth standard is an effort in evolving the child's knowledge step by step from the world around him to the world beyond --to its extended family, society, culture, state and so large. Shall we kindle their enthusiasm? Or else shall we prove Tagore's words? "The revised National Curriculum Framework (NCF) opens with a quotation from Rabindranath Tagore's essay, Civilization and Progress, in which the poet reminds us that a 'creative spirit' and 'generous joy' are key in childhood, both of which can be distorted by an unthinking adult world." (Executive Summary of NCF-2005) According to NCERT, the languages should contain 60 per cent of the local content, and 40 per cent of the non-local content. In the non-local content, it is allowed 20-25 content of neighboring states, while the remaining 15-20 per cent is reserved for issues related to national importance. What is the objective of SCERT? Shall it apply theory evolution or theory of involution?

The decision to reform the syllabus taken by the ministry of state education affairs and the board with the indecent haste has turned the situation nasty. In ten days time it has passed two G.O.'s, the first one was on 22nd of August (Proc. Rc. No. 279/B/C&T/SCERT/2014) to follow the changes in the syllabus and the second one was on 31st of August (Memo. No. 48757/Prog.II/A1/2015) that the changes were kept in abeyance till further orders. What were the objections in the mean time? Did the board ever conduct any survey to find the

difficulties of the teacher? Did they consult any ELT experts and take their help to support the classroom teaching? If the efforts were made so far to reduce the strain and the struggle of the teachers and the children, the syllabus might have been enjoyable and attainable.

Many of the topics from VI to X class English lessons were subjected to deletion purportedly based on their culture, length and unfamiliarity of the text, unfamiliar vocabulary, mismatching of a theme, content being beyond the standard and imagination of a child, and repetition of themes. It is wise to remember that the syllabus was commonly prepared for all the children who are studying in our state syllabus schools with a view to meet the objectives of the curriculum. The same topic may be difficult and irrelevant for a rural Telugu medium child but it may be vice versa for a student from the corporate background. An eighth class lesson 'The Fun They Had' was deleted due to the lengthy text, unknown concept and beyond the imagination of a child. Some minor changes in the presentation could have made this lesson interesting to all. An all-time favorite science fiction Telugu movie, 'Aditya 369' about a time machine which can move to the past and the future is familiar to all our children. The lesson plan can be built around showing the movie or an animated video of the lesson present on You Tube. Another poem 'Preteen Pretext' is about how children are addicted to mobile phones and how relations are affected. Is it not relevant to the present society? It was deleted for its ambiguity. The ambiguity can be removed by replacing some words and phrases or a small introduction can be well worked in classroom teaching. 'The Never-Never Nest', a X class lesson was deleted because of its length, foreign culture, and mismatch with the theme 'human relations'. The lesson was very familiar in the intermediate course ten years ago. Paying the amount in installments and its consequences are not new to us. The play is flexible for role playing with a few characters and crispy dialogues. How the play fails to show the craze for modern comforts at the cost of human relationships, even for their own new-born, is debatable. Another deplorable deletion is keeping aside Smt. Sarojini Naidu's poem 'In the Bazaars of Hyderabad' because of 'Telangana culture' and it being 'beyond the standard of the learners'. Markets at the temples or fairs, are they beyond of our child's imagination? Even rural school children can find similarities in their rural weekly markets too. If the sensitivity of the poet can't be appreciated, why can't it be used to develop children's vocabulary? Is it not our duty to introduce our country's best writers and their writings?

Preparation either for examinations or setting up a new system is a key concept. The controversies and confusion created in implementing the syllabus could have been made clear when the criterion behind its selection was conveyed to the teachers earlier. If the board was unable to conduct full-fledged orientation and training programs, why did it fail to provide at least a skeleton lesson plan for each one? Is there any scarcity for subject experts and ELT trainers? If some tools, techniques, or methods of language teaching were provided to ignite the fire in the teachers, that fire would help them to create their own methods suitable to their children's needs.

We, elders, teach the children 'Mistakes are common'. But we too remember a famous quote, "A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them, and strong enough to correct them." Can't we learn anything from this? Keeping the lessons aside because of 'ambiguity, beyond the level of students', and so on, is it not just like turning the heel back? The journey of education on less travelled path is always bumpy. We shouldn't let the bumps pull us down or retreat. Clarity of vision and insight are necessary to achieve the goal. Gandhiji says, 'Future depends on what we do at present'. 'English In Action', a nine year project in Bangladesh, aims to improve the teaching of English by offering alternative forms of support including integrating ICT. As a part of this program, the primary and the secondary teachers were trained in developing their language proficiency using mobile technologies and given recorded audio and video materials for classroom practices. Burma in collaboration with the British council initiated a project 'English for Education College Trainers' for the teacher educators. In the first year of the two year project, teachers were trained in developing their language proficiency and in the second year the training was given to improve their teaching methodologies. It is to reiterate that developing language teachers' proficiency and establishing a new system should not be confined to building up theories. Program in action is a must. Conducting short and long term courses, workshops, seminars, webinars, competitions... in-person or using ICT (smart phones, iPods, and MP3 players) would really help the teachers in developing their language proficiency, refreshing the

subject knowledge, hone the teaching methodologies. A common platform for all the teachers to share their experiences and difficulties in implementing the new syllabus has to be provided. Otherwise the state curriculum-2011 will ever be a pie in the sky.

If one teacher is committed, then his/her students will excel. If the whole system is dedicated to its work, the entire society will enjoy the benefits of it. The education group, Pearson, conducted a survey on the top 20 most successful education systems in the world considering the factors like international test scores, graduation rates, amount of people pursuing higher education, etc. The top 5 countries which outshine the others are Finland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, and Singapore. The common characteristics identified among the five are highly qualified teachers, heavy investment on education, involving all the stakeholders in the system, a structured curriculum to produce well-rounded students, and high-stakes examination system. We too have enough infrastructure and funds, what we need is dedication and commitment to transfer our dreams into realities. As Gautama Buddha says 'No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path'.

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