

What should be the future of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation and No Detention Policy in India?

Aanchal Chomal



Reforms in assessments have been extensively deliberated in India. National policies and commissions before Independence, such as the Hartog Committee (1929) and Sargent Plan (1944) as well as those post-independence such as the Mudaliar Commission (1953), Kothari Commission (1964), National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 and '86, Learning Without Burden (1993) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2000 and 2005 have recommended changes in the examination system. Few of the key ideas have been to make examinations *comprehensive* by assessing a range of areas, *shift from rote based questions* to those testing for understanding, application and higher cognitive skills, *use of multiple methods of assessments*, maintaining records of student's work, *use of grades instead of marks* and more recently the use of formative assessments to facilitate learning.

Echoing these changes, the National Focus Group Position Paper on Examination Reforms (NCERT 2006) discusses the need for *structural and procedural changes* in the current examination system. Right from the purpose of exams, to its quality, procedure, use and impact; it recommends changes in multiple dimensions. It endorses an alternative, or more aptly a *complementary system* of assessments in the name of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). It defines *CCE as a system of school based evaluation which is continual or periodic (before the instruction and during it) and comprehensive (including scholastics and co-scholastics areas) using multiple modes of assessment.*

While policies and commissions have nudged the system to change its approach to assessments often with sparing results, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 mandated schools to make the shift from traditional examinations to a system of continuous and comprehensive evaluation. The no-detention policy has been in effect since the coming into force of the RTE Act in 2010. Section 30 (1) of the RTE Act provides that *"no child shall be required to pass any*

Board examination till completion of elementary education." Under this policy, no child can be held back or expelled from school until the end of Class 8, when he attains the age of 14 and passes out of the purview of the RTE Act.

Ever since its inception, CCE and No Detention Policy (NDP) has been subject to intense scrutiny. Educationists, policy makers, practitioners, parents and students have all had mixed reactions about this move. Some views have been in favour of the policy while many others have vehemently argued against it. Concerns have been raised about the inappropriate and often incorrect implementation of CCE and NDP on the ground. Various new assessment practices such as allotment of weightages to formative and summative assessments, series of short tests, formats for grading students, use of projects and portfolios, etc. have emerged with the introduction of CCE. Some of these practices have led to recurring tests causing stress and anxiety to teachers, parents and students, piles of data work, sometimes leading to incorrect data entries while filling up formats, flourishing of the 'ready-made project' industry, promotion of students to subsequent grades even if they haven't acquired age appropriate competencies, ad-hoc assessments of co-scholastic areas, etc.

Much of this has led people to realise that instead of reducing the stress of exams, CCE has increased it. Equally criticised is the NDP which according to many has led to a major decline in students' and teachers' motivation to learn and teach. All of this has led many people to conclude that as a country we are still not ready for this kind of evaluation.

Amidst all these concerns and perceptions, there has been inadequate discourse on what really Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is. Why is it necessary? How is it aligned to the goals and ideals of education of our country? In the enthusiasm of implementation, we have completely missed out on understanding what CCE really means?

CCE rests on some assumptions about children's learning, teaching-learning process, purpose of assessments and the role of the teacher.

1. One of the foremost assumptions of CCE is that learning happens continuously- inside the classroom, outside the classroom, while conducting a science lab experiment, while solving a math problem, while expressing one's thoughts on a paper in the form of a poetry, a song or a drawing; all through the day in a school, children continuously demonstrate their learning in various forms and modes.
2. Since learning happens in a continuous manner, in order to facilitate the learning process, the pedagogic practices in a school also need to be dynamic. Opportunities provided to learners to develop various abilities, engage in multiple learning experiences, gain conceptual knowledge and work in collaboration with peers need to be ensured.
3. When teaching learning processes are dynamic, the nature of assessments also need to be dynamic. The purpose of such assessments, also termed formative assessments, are meant to aid the teacher's understanding of student learning and evaluate the efficacy of the learning experience. So far most of the assessments have been 'evaluative' in nature i.e. provided marks or grades without specifying the criteria. Neither have these kind of evaluations provided appropriate and credible feedback to students on which areas to focus upon to improve further.
 - a. Formative assessments are fundamentally different from any current form of assessments being used across most of our schools. It implies systematically tracking every child's learning trajectory through a series of well thought through assessment methodologies; many of which could be informal, closely integrated in the lesson plan of the teacher. Data emerging from these assessments have to be scrutinised and analysed by a teacher to help her devise appropriate strategies to scaffold each child's learning. What should be assessed emerges from a deep clarity about the learning objectives of the topic/concept, and how it should be assessed depends on what the teacher believes is the most appropriate tool for assessing the knowledge/skill/disposition in question and the level of the learner.

4. The last and yet the most important assumption is about the role of a teacher. Teachers play the most important role in facilitating student learning in formal school environments. In playing that role their beliefs about children and how they learn becomes extremely crucial. Any form of bias against children's ability to learn can thwart the learning process. Equally important is the teacher's belief about her own role in the classroom. Teachers who value children's experiences, provide space for learner narratives, are collaborative, understand the needs and concerns, both academic and non-academic of children-can go a long way in facilitating learning of their students.

The above stated beliefs and assumptions form the underlying premise of CCE.

Now let us turn our attention to the practices in schools and the directives provided in policy guidelines on CCE-

1. Most states elaborated CCE guidelines in manuals or handbooks. These manuals detailed out the new assessment pattern, for example, the number of times tests have to be taken, weightage to formative and summative, how many kinds of assessment can be done, etc.
2. Most states changed their report cards to allow for multiple reporting about a child through the entire academic year; in most cases marks were replaced by grades.
3. New areas were added to the report cards- for example, personal and social qualities. In some cases grades were given on these dimensions, sometimes qualitative comments.
4. New formats were introduced and the teacher was expected to fill in the details at periodic intervals. Training was provided to them in the process of filling formats.

Amidst all this there are several things that remained unchanged-

1. The nature of classroom pedagogy continues to be characterised by teacher-directed pedagogy limited to transacting the textbook rather than aiming for conceptual clarity and attainment of curricular goals.
2. Teacher professional development programmes only inadequately address the concepts of pedagogy and assessment both at the pre-service and in-service level.

3. The perspective on assessment is still to label children as slow, average or fast learners. The onus of learning still lies with the child rather than the school environment and the preparation of the teacher.
4. Administrators and teacher-support systems entrusted with mentoring teachers in classrooms continue to inspect their records and formats.

In the absence of any perspective building workshops on assessments it seemed a little unfair to expect teachers to understand it on their own. Also fixed schedules of formats and assessment time tables defeated the entire purpose of continuous formative assessments as they are need-based, changing with the need of every class. In the absence of all the ground work, could CCE have ever been successful?

The obvious answer is NO, or to a very limited extent: perhaps only in the classrooms of teachers who are already aware of good pedagogy. Given this scenario, it was obvious that the much-needed reform in assessment had to fail.

In order to improve the learning level of our students in schools, it is important to stay invested in assessment practices that are formative in nature. This can be only ensured through a system of CCE. There could be a set of things that can be prioritised to achieve this:

1. Acknowledge that doing this is difficult and it would require some time. It is not easy to change our mindsets about evaluation. But it is necessary and therefore we need to give it time.
2. Teachers need to be provided with perspective-building workshops on assessment. CCE is not to be looked at as a technique or a policy that can be addressed through a timetable and few formats.
3. A strong system of teacher mentoring is needed- to provide teacher's with support in designing

assessments, synthesising documents, writing qualitative reports. These can be provided by teacher educators, civil society organizations and university students who may be familiar with best practices across the world.

4. Education functionaries supervising schools need to observe classroom teaching and not just the formats and report cards of students. If a teacher is doing CCE, reliable evidences of it would be visible in her classroom and not in the staffroom.
5. CCE should be practised in teacher preparation programmes to enable teacher educators to be better informed about the 'implementation' of such assessments. Also, student teachers would be able to watch closely and learn how to do it in their classrooms.
6. Parents should demand from schools qualitative reports that would enable them to understand what is it that the child is really learning in the school in various dimensions.

Coupled with CCE, it is also important that the twin policy of No-Detention stays. While there are multiple pros and cons of the No-Detention Policy it will be regressive to detain students due to inadequate conceptualization and implementation of CCE. While the future of CCE and NDP still remain uncertain we know that, as a country, we have not done enough to effectively implement either initiative. What we saw as a country was the implementation of the latter without adequate efforts to put into effect the former. It is also well recognised that assessments that are integrated with the teaching-learning process have far reaching impact on student learning.

Now it is up to us as a country to decide whether we would like to continue critiquing the faulty implementation and baseless failure of the initiative or make efforts to learn from our mistakes and make it a reality in our schools.

Aanchal has been with Azim Premji Foundation for 12 years. She heads the Institute for Assessment and Accreditation at Azim Premji School of Continuing Education and University Resource Centre. Her work involves developing frameworks, tools, processes and approaches for assessments of students, teachers, teacher educators and educational institutions. She provides capacity building programs on assessment and evaluation across various states in India. She is a post graduate in Geography from Centre for Studies in Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and has graduated in Geography from Presidency College, Calcutta. She may be contacted at aanchal@azimpremjifoundation.org