

'USER-FRIENDLY CCE'

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The introduction of Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation [CCE], as part of examination reform in all schools across our vast nation, has made the general buzz around it sound professional with terms like 'formative' and 'summative' being used comfortably by teachers. This is a welcome development since it is our teachers who actually operationalize this initiative even in remote districts in the country. And this is largely due to the effort many State Governments are putting into training their Department of Education functionaries at the district, block and cluster levels, Head Teachers, Teachers ... just about everyone involved! Even pupils have become aware of them.

After all the various conferences, conventions, committees and commissions that were held for at least a decade to put together this strategy to help extricate our children from the soul-destructive pursuit of and competition for marks, at first glance the move into CCE seemed appropriate and lifted my spirits considerably.

But closer acquaintance with the intricately formulated system brought further clarity that brought those elevated spirits straight down again. But this drop forced me to make a reality check about CCE. What follows are two views - one which seeks to reveal why CCE may actually be old wine in new bottles, and the other on some practical ways that may help make it work more productively. Here goes.

Conceptually, CCE is visualized to help eliminate the 'pressure cooker' syndrome in Indian schooling and thus result in a fairer, more consistent judgment of the quality of pupils'

learning. By moving away from cyclical tests and exams, the onus is laid more on teachers to judge their pupils' achievement continuously through serial short [and very short] formal and informal 'formative' assessment along with formal 'summative' evaluation at the end of each term. Doing away with cyclical unit tests and the fearsome final exam at the end of each academic year that used to traumatize pupils right from the time they climbed out of their nappies was the stuff of national dreams. So far ... so good!

However, monstrous devils lie in the details of CCE and how they have been interpreted leading to implementation that does not fulfill the vision. On the one hand, pupils are now constantly being quizzed, often through unannounced class tests that usually carry 10 marks or 5 marks or even 1 mark, which requires them to be fully prepared all the time in every subject if they wish to do well. On the other hand, teachers have to constantly conduct mini formative assessments in every curricular subject and co-curricular area to satisfy the continuous and comprehensive nature of the new beast. Not to forget the expectation that teachers must informally assess their pupils' learning every day and award letter grades for the same too. A little gentle investigation in this informal area revealed that teachers beat the system by awarding grades arbitrarily with the common understanding that they will be level with the marks that pupils obtain in the myriad formal tests.

The burden remains and children continue to feel 'like an ant in the middle of a football field' as one English girl famously expressed it some

years ago! Hence, the systemic pressure cooker still hisses loudly!

In my view, irrespective of whether tracking of pupils is conducted cyclically or continuously, user-friendly CCE will happen only when it is referenced to systematically planned and expected learning objectives and outcomes that will guide classroom work. Only when there is a clear notion of what to look for in pupils' understanding of concepts and skill development as a result of the lesson, can the quality of learning be judged helpfully and consistently. The remaining section will deal with a couple of user-friendly tactics which will serve to increase the effectiveness of CCE a great deal.

A convenient starting point to increasing user-friendliness would be to clarify what the terms 'assessment', 'evaluation', 'formative' and 'summative' are meant to indicate. The word assessment originates from the Latin word 'assidere' which means 'to sit beside and coach to higher achievement' while evaluation refers to the placing of a value on something after careful examination. The word formative generally means the development of each part of learning even as it is progressing toward mastery of the whole, while the word summative most often refers to a total, comprehensive and cumulative judgmental summary of the whole of learning after it has been completed. When applied to learning in schools and classrooms, real formative assessment is the result of purposefully planned lessons which indicate clearly the goals of learning or expected learning outcomes which, when shared with pupils, become the hub for classroom activity, keeping pupils engaged with learning concepts and skills thoroughly while teachers facilitate successful mastery step by step. Constant reference to these objectives during classroom interaction will help teachers and pupils continuously assess achievement during the course of learning, gradually moving

through each part of the lesson till the whole lesson has been grasped. And real summative evaluation is conducted at the end of each term/year for the purpose of establishing the overall quality of learning.

Put differently, formative assessment can be referred to as 'Assessment FOR Learning' because, with the help of the shared and expected user-friendly learning outcomes, its purpose is to constantly develop and raise pupils' achievement during learning. And, summative evaluation can be referred to as 'Assessment OF Learning' because exam questions are also referenced against the same expected outcomes but only for the limited purpose of judging and establishing the quality of learning by assigning a value or mark after learning has been completed.

The table on the next page will deepen understanding of the nuances around both these approaches inherent in user-friendly CCE:

User-friendly assessment for learning will thrive in classrooms where pupils ask rather than answer questions as they interact with the work they do, where they understand what/why they are learning and receive attention and feedback when they need it, and in so doing, raise their own standard of achievement. To promote good thinking and learning, there's no substitute for teachers sharing learning objectives and targets at the beginning and checking/assessing achievement at the end of each lesson, providing regular and descriptive feedback, encouraging independence in learning and adjusting teaching to learners' pace and needs. This constant formative assessment for learning can then be followed by periodic summative assessment of learning in order to establish the quality of learning and through it, motivate pupils to raise their standard of achievement.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IS FORMATIVE During Course of Learning	ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING IS SUMMATIVE After Completion of Learning
Forward looking since pupils move ahead steadily and confidently by assessing their progress against shared and expected learning outcomes	Backward looking since teachers evaluate and summarize quality of pupils' learning after it has been finished
Constant since teachers and pupils are continuously assessing progress and dealing with blocks [if any]	Cyclical since it is conducted periodically
Divergent since pupils develop independently and at their own pace	Convergent because tests and exams require the same output from all pupils
During Learning since pupils' assessment of their progress is immediate with the teacher's facilitation; pupils always know where they are, where they need to get to and how to get there	End of Learning since examination of achievement is conducted after learning
Descriptive since assessment is aligned to the shared learning objectives that indicate what the purpose[s] of the lesson is and what the concepts and skills that need to be mastered are	Judgmental since the purpose is to evaluate quality of learning
Remedial since pupils can constantly seek the teacher's help in clearing doubts or obstacles which may be hindering their achievement as the lesson progresses	Non-Remedial since purpose is evaluation without indication of how to improve learning
Qualitative since teacher and pupils can judge the quality of learning against the shared objectives on an on-going basis and work toward raising standard of achievement	Quantitative since the reference is in terms of marks and grades
Teacher + Pupil Oriented since assessment is the result of constant and dynamic classroom interaction between teachers and pupils	Teacher Oriented since evaluation takes place without any interaction between teachers and pupils

As a final thought, it would do well to judge the effectiveness of any strategy by its impact on the main users' core need i.e. how well pupils' learning takes place is the real litmus test. This is not rocket science ... good teachers have always known it instinctively and have achieved good learning by their pupils without undue stress or resistance.

Hence, CCE can translate into resounding success if interpreted and implemented correctly. Only then can it become an effective strategy and help to reduce the unyieldingly high pressure that still characterizes Indian schooling.

User friendly CCE will flourish only when the systemic pressure cooker purrs softly!

Shobhana currently works with the Foundation as a consultant and brings several decades' experience in school leadership in India and abroad with her. Earlier as a school principal, her passion had been about how pupils actually think and learn in the classroom and how their learning outcomes are assessed. As an academic / instructional leader in the schools she has led, her thrust areas included working with teachers to understand and use ways that would increase pupil-centricity, and effective teaching-learning-assessment practices that would promote this focus. Later, she worked with a group of schools to develop school-wide quality assurance strategies that would help them in self-evaluation and need-based school improvement planning. Shobhana's interest in 'Assessment For Learning' was developed greatly during a Fellowship at Cambridge University, UK in 2005 where she worked with this approach in considerable detail. She can be contacted at shobhana.verghese@azimpremjifoundation.org