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CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS: RELEVANCE AND QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Students can learn in different environments and through different ways. Learning may take place beyond the boundary of textbooks and the classroom; it may take place through a diversity of learning materials and experiences. Though textbooks are not the only learning resources, they still play an important role in student learning. Textbooks are not only teaching materials for teachers, but also students' self-directed learning materials for preparation and revision purposes.Textbooks play an important role in teaching learning process especially in developing countries such as India. Textbooks are very useful and accessible resources that students and teachers can utilize according to their needs. Curriculum plays an essential role in enabling learning and in articulating and supporting education that is relevant to holistic development. It is the curriculum that provides the structure for the provision of quality learning, especially where teachers might be under-qualified and inexperienced, their classrooms under-resourced, and their students lacking the prior frameworks within which to situate their learning. This article presents the relevance and qualities of a textbook and curriculum that can improve the quality school education.

INTRODUCTION

To align the curricula with the Aims of Education in the 21st Century, the Curriculum Development Institute has conducted a holistic review of the curricula and developed an open and flexible curriculum framework that caters for students' diverse needs. The current curriculum aims to help students learn how to learn, cultivate positive values and attitudes, and a commitment to life-long learning. Being broad and balanced, the curriculum promotes life-wide learning, whole-person development and the development of generic skills for equipping students with knowledge and skills to cope with challenges in the future.

QUALITY TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks are considered at the heart of educational activities, as they provide students a rich array of new and potentially interesting facts, and open the door to a world of fantastic experience. The textbooks have significant role as they are considered as primary vehicles for delivering content knowledge, for determining in large measure what goes on in a class and for assessing what students do and do not learn. A majority of teachers consider textbooks as the only teaching resource. Textbooks do not only influence what and how students learn, but also what and how teachers teach. There are factors that make the textbook a quality textbook by critical and rigorous evaluation processes Quality textbooks, including both printed and electronic textbooks (e-textbooks), which support a learner-focused curriculum contain the core elements of the subject curriculum, as well as learning strategies useful for the study of the subject. Being important sources of reading for students, quality textbooks help develop students' ability to learn through reading. The amount and quality of the texts to be included therefore deserve greater attention. Other desirable features of a good textbook include interactivity, the ability to arouse the interest of students, and the capacity to actively engage and involve them in the learning process. In other words, good textbooks tell, involve and interact with students.

CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY TEXTBOOKS

1. **Conformity to curriculum policy and scope.** This characteristic refers to coverage of the contents and objectives of the National Curriculum

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2. **Vocabulary and format.** For this characteristic statements regarding, content organization, level of the vocabulary used in the textbook, page layout, relevance of the pictures and illustrations, print style and size, readability of the content etc. should be in a quality textbook.
3. **Horizontal and vertical alignment of the text.** It refers to alignment of the textbook with other textbooks of the same grade, relevance of end of chapter assessments/exercises to contents of the chapter/unit, logical links in the content presented within and among the chapters/units, content organization and presentation, etc.
4. **Acceptability.** For this characteristic statements about students' diverse environment and socio-economic background, relevance of examples with students' daily life, quality of paper, printing and binding of the book, authors' credentials, attractiveness of the title, should be in a quality textbook.
5. **Text reliability.** It refers to accuracy of the content and data, adequacy of the content, historical correctness of the facts and figures, free of misconceptions contents, and updated data
6. **Cognitive development and creative thinking.** This characteristic refers to the nature, relevance and level of learning activities included in the textbook. Activities given in the textbook should be according to students' developmental level and the content is helpful in developing thinking skills in the students; there is correspondence between size of print and the age and grade of the student
7. **Learning and Assessment.** This characteristic refers to difficulty and understanding level of end of chapter assessments and alignment with objectives of enacted National Curriculum. End of chapter assessments are according to the content matter given in the textbook and to student's mental development level.
8. **Bias free.** For this characteristic statements regarding, divers activities for diverse background students, gender equality, exclusion of creeds and areas, and biasness with respect to women, minorities and disable persons, should be in a quality textbook.

QUALITY CURRICULUM

Most countries want to have a modern, high-quality curriculum, and also want to maximise the potential of curriculum for enhancing the overall quality of education and its relevance for student and societal needs. For this purpose, they develop quality criteria for the curriculum that are turned into main principles of developing their curriculum. In any discussion of curriculum development, it is difficult to avoid Ralph Tyler's classic statement1 of four fundamental questions which need to be addressed in the process:

1. What educational purposes do we seek to attain?

2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?

3. How should these educational experiences be effectively organized?

4. How should we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Quality criteria for a curriculum may target aspects such as:

- Are their clear aims for the curriculum?
- Is the curriculum up-to-date?
- Is it relevant to students' current and future lives, experiences, environments and aspirations?
- Does it create a socially and economically prosperous future while respecting the country's past – its cultural history and traditions?
- Is the curriculum equitable and inclusive? (i.e. does it take into account the diversity of learners and the different learner needs; does it cater for marginalized groups; does it avoid biases?)

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- Is the curriculum learner-centred and learner-friendly? (i.e. does it take learner needs into account; does it avoid biases and discrimination; is it well sequenced with regard to the learners' age; does it contribute to personal development and life skills; does it make sense –is it meaningful for learners; does it avoid overloading learners)?
- Is the curriculum open and flexible, so that it can address new challenges & opportunities by integrating new/emerging issues?
- Is the curriculum coherent and consistent across different education stages/grades/streams and learning areas/subjects?

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND VALUES IN THE CURRICULUM

The development in students of broadly defined competencies or capabilities, such as critical and creative thinking, depends on the integration of three broad learning domains: knowledge, skills and values. A quality curriculum fulfils following three dmains:

1. Knowledge: When used in this limited sense and contrasted with skills and values, the term, 'knowledge', refers to content knowledge, or to propositional, or declarative, knowledge, including, for example, both theoretical and empirical knowledge: knowledge 'that', as in "I know that …".

2. Skills: 'Skills' refers to procedural knowledge, and includes, for example, cognitive and non-cognitive skills, 'hard' and 'soft' skills: knowledge 'how', as in "I know how…".

3. Values: 'Values' refers to dispositional knowledge, and includes, for example, attitudes (which are consequent on the values we hold), moral dispositions, and motivation, will and commitment: knowledge 'to', as in "I know to …".

THE SEVEN R' s OF A QUALITY CURRICULUM

1. **Rigorous** – A rigorous curriculum embodies and affords students opportunities to develop a deeper understanding and not just show what they already know. Too often curricula state carefully defined objectives that put an unintentional cap on students' understanding and obscure the big ideas of the discipline, leading to superficial coverage. A rigorous curriculummust point the direction for learning but be open enough to extend students' understanding beyond a minimal outcome.
2. **Rewarding** –The written curriculum seldom addresses the issue of intrinsic rewards,but the enacted curriculum must if it is to engage students in buildingunderstanding. Good teachers know this, but curricula often loses sightof it. Rather than prescribing a list of knowledge and skills that *might* beuseful at some later date, in some other place, for some other purpose,the curriculum should do all it can to situate learning in the present,
3. **Requires Independence** – Educational theorist Jerome Bruner defines understanding as the abilityto use and apply one's skills in novel situations to solve problems, makedecisions, and advance new understandings. This means that learnersmust necessarily be able to spot occasions for the use of their skills andknowledge in the moment, make appropriate choices, and follow throughwith application.

   A quality curriculum must be filled with opportunities for students tomake choices and to direct their learning. When students experiencedifficulty and are at the edge of their competence, support needs to bethere, but as educators

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we need to be more comfortable with themessiness and individuality of building understanding, asking ourselves:Where does the learning become personal? What choices were made andrisks taken? Where and how did students learn from their mistakes?

4. **Real** – Disciplinary learning can be thought of as a process by which individuals gradually increase their participation in communities of practice. As such, a curriculum that builds understanding must look to engage students in authentic disciplinary activities so that students' classroom activities mirror the real work of adults in the field. Rather than learning *about* math, science, writing, history, and so on, students must become mathematicians, scientists, authors, and historians to build true disciplinary understanding. When a topic is assigned to a curriculum, we need to ask: When, where, and how does this topic arise and/or become significant in the lives of those working in the field? What contexts giverise to this topic and can imbue it with meaning? How can this topicintersect with the lives of our students in a meaningful way?
5. **Rich in Thinking** –A quality curriculum asks more of students than just memorization and replication. Students must make connections, observe closely, ask questions, formconjectures, identify points of view, consider alternatives, evaluate outcomes, make evidence-based judgments, and so on. One of the most important questions educators can ask is, "What is the thinking students will do as they progress through this activity?" If teachers don't know what and where the thinking is in a lesson, it is unlikely to be little more than an activity. Furthermore, to assess students' developing understanding, educators have to find ways touncover and make the thinking of students' visible, which leads to the next point.
6. **Revealing** –A quality curriculum must constantly seek not only to reveal what it isthat students do and do not understand, but *how* they understand it. Thisis the holy grail of ongoing assessment, which is not a separate piece ofthe enacted curriculum but part and parcel of it.A curriculum of understanding also should reveal students' naïve conceptions of a topic.
7. **Reflective** –As a learner, it can be challenging to know what one really thinks orunderstands. It is even more difficult to know what others reallyunderstand or where they are in their learning. Reflection can helpaddress these challenges. Reflection on one's learning—not one'sfeelings about an activity or experience but on the actual learning itself—helps to anchor understanding and facilitates connection making.

   For example, responses to the prompt "I used to think…. But now I think…." Can reveal a lot about students' learning. Such reflections help make one's thinking visible to oneself and others by revealing thoughtprocesses and lines of reasoning. Reflection on learning forces us toreconsider the purposes of that learning and situate it within an ongoingprocess of developing understanding.

CONCLUSION

Since teachers in the public sector in India have almost no access to the national curriculum document, provided only to textbook writers for their guidance, it is imperative that the textbook writers have an additional responsibility to ensure that the textbook reflects basic characteristics of quality textbooks. Teachers should also be

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included in the pool to identify issues related to its effective use and suggesting strategies for improvement. It is quite obvious that teachers would be able to make effective use of the textbook only if they realized the value of textbook as an important teaching and learning resource. Careful analysis of whether any problems identified lie in the curriculum, in teaching practices, in learning circumstances, or elsewhere can help in generation of future quality curriculum by improving the previous one.

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