



## REFLECTING ON THE QUINTESSENTIAL POSITIONING OF CHILDREN IN OUR CLASSROOM: IN THE BROADER DOMAIN OF PARTICIPATION

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With the coming of NEP 2020 and the new National Curriculum Framework, the ideals of child centric education and holistic development are on the fore. The reflective approach towards making an honest attempt in this direction firstly involves critical analysis of the positioning of our children in the classroom, which comes in the broader arena of the 'extent of participation of our children' in their own educational experiences. The 'tap root educational model' in which teacher acts as the main anchor root for the standing classroom discourse, needs to be replaced by the 'Fibrous educational model', in which instead of single instruction model, numerous individual entities, symbolising our young children form the collective root system of classroom discourse. The attempt of the educational researches across the world has been to understand how are children learn the best, this is a dynamic field as the educational ethos of the children is embed in a drastically changing psychological, emotional, mental, socio, economic and political scenario. Developing confident, problem solving, responsible and dutiful citizens for the state, needs a careful strong positioning of children in the classroom, which gives them the necessary training for taking up their sincere adult roles. The present paper builds in its reflective spiral on a series of theoretical and research perspectives across the globe, to narrow down to the tranformatory changes required in both pedagogy and process of the Indian Classroom.

**Keywords:** *Child Participation, Curriculum Development, Democratisation of Education.*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the democratic domain of liberty, putting forth once choices and exercising them as a right is of great importance. The wave of education now actively points towards the significance of intricately carving the initial educational experiences of the children in a very diligent and productive way. The journey from

education towards the proximity of actualisation in real classroom settings is the major challenge for the educationists these days. The basic tenet of society being responsible for craving out, shaping children in their desired cast is now surmounting a major change where children's are given the constitutional right and freedom of exercising their own choices and enter a

zone where they aren't compelled to follow a pre carved out path. (Santos- Pais , 1999) . With the recent emergence of the National Policy of Education and the National Curriculum Framework the child liberating and strengthening perspectives are now well documented as policy guidelines and form the enshrining principles for the curriculum constructors and implementers. The lineage of theoretical works that give the power to children to think, design and be the creators of their classroom experience is enlightening. (Lansdown, 2005; Lindsay, 1998; MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007).

This progressive curricular framework finds traces to the **British Columbia (2008)** framework for Early Learning and Development, wherein the agencies of the children are given the blossoming opportunities of blooming to their complete potential. Children are now the complete potent entities of having complete power over their curricular existence and progress widening from the field of language to literature, science to technology, mathematics to mathematical abilities, attitude to aptitude. But the document does accept that despite the celebrated principles enshrined in policy documents, we as an educational system lack it at the stage of comprehension of the document and its implementation. We (Adults) still rule or aim to rule the educational experiences of children and justify the execution of this forced power on children. Children have to be brought out of this apparent ambience and consciousness of the oppressed towards the realm of being a truly empowered entity. The journey from marginalisation to majoritarian culture is at utmost stake. Both at the level of curriculum construction and execution drastic changes, progressive steps are needed. We need to set the stage for the new directors, script writers and actors, which are the children themselves. This will serve as the base for a truly empowering pedagogy, that will create truly problem solving, democratic and empowered individuals for the present and the future. The education system of today needs to transform into a reflective community, wherein the teachers needs to be the ultimate facilitator of blooming the child's innate potential to reach to the. (Hart, 1992; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993).

## **2. DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR EVOLVING AN EMPOWERING CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN**

The theoretical principles of child centric education and learner centred curriculum faces a grave debate wherein one side we present the child as a capable complete entity in himself/herself and on the other hands we have the legal constitutional rights wherein the children as subjects to whom state needs to ensure protection and safety. The compromise lies between giving a protective environment to the children wherein they traverse the journey from

childhood to reflective adolescence towards productive adults of the state. When the proposition of listening to the children is being presented, it doesn't circumscribe the tenet that complete adherence to what the child is saying needs to be done, but yes, a conversationalist mode needs to be on, in which if the option that the child is presenting is not accepted then the child needs to be explained that why the option that the child was presenting was not accepted and why the other option has been. The child herein needs to be seen as thinking competent individual who can reflect on arguments and understand the diverse opinions. The concept of participation sees its germinating roots from the home and school set up but extends much beyond towards the cultural, social, economic and political spheres of our existence. (Hart, 1992).

A child's educational experiences cannot be isolated from their socio-cultural existence and children have to be seen as potent members of the society. Luff (2009) emphasizes the role of teachers especially in strengthening the social identity of children through their educational experiences especially in their early formative years. Though the theoretical foundation is now repetitive with these principles, still the methodology to integrate into educational practice is the main issue of concern. The challenge is the relative positioning of the child and the adult in the educational process, to ultimately give the throne of execution in the hands of the child but still ensure active facilitation process of the adult to ensure the viability of the selected method. The basic challenge for the curricular framers is the presentation of a curricular document which serves as the guiding light for the teachers present at the grass root level. The absence of a clear set of linear activities and events and their corresponding extensive ambiguity, thus, many a times makes it unclear for the teacher in the classroom that whether the selected path is leading to the aforesaid aims or not. The textbooks also need to present the content in such a way that the teacher centric mode of classroom discourse is discouraged and the child centred mode is encouraged. The arena of implications for teacher education programmes and teacher educators is immense, especially in this transformative times wherein the National Education Policy and the National Curriculum Framework is urging the educational community towards a radical transformative shift.

## **3. THE EVOLVING PERSPECTIVE IN DEVELOPING A CHILD PARTICIPATORY CURRICULUM**

As in a fibrous root system that caters to the biological family of grasses, multiple smaller roots form the foundation of the largely flexible grass that has the power to sustain the biggest of storms due to its flexibility, the path towards evolutionary development in this direction. Innovation is the need of the hour,

much propagated one too, in true modern Indian times where innovation is encouraged towards blooming self-employment opportunity, in the economical arena of entrepreneurship. The fostering of the culture of dialogicity is considered as the pivotal road of success in this endeavour. The overlapping arenas of objectives, means and result need to widen to see the small bridges that interlink the aforesaid principles, makes these bridges more visible, prominent and meaningful (Olsson, 2009). Planning and implementation, need to accept the ground challenges which will lay in the unforeseen and the unprecedented, but the reflective teacher will be trained and ready to accept the ground challenges and to modify the teaching pedagogy and lesson plan on the spot to make an earnest attempt of being true to the enshrined goals of child centric education, that is in the best interest of the children always. The training of the teachers in the arena of reflection and action research are the potential empowering tools for the teacher educators of today. The teacher needs to expect not only challenges but many constructive new techniques from the children which may not be the original part of her teaching resource methodology initially. The best teacher for a teacher are the children, and building a truly dialogic teacher children productive ecosystem is the key for the transformative desired change. Especially considering the effect of pandemic in broadening and deepening the learning gaps, teacher educators and curricular framers need to be open to the psychological, social, mental and emotional challenges that now thrive the educational domain. Looking at theoretical traces of these evolutionary thought, we can look at the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who challenged the formalised structure of education and ventured into innovative, flexible, boundary breaking curricula according to individual, child specific needs. They emphasize on understanding the individual history and case study of the children to design the curriculum best suited to their needs. They talk about diluting the stringent boundaries to lead to a new era of evolutionary discourse in education, which now is popularised a promoting innovation in curricular domains. The teacher needs to identify the gaps, and think of the constructive way to bridge the gaps according to the needs, interest, ability, attitude and aptitude of the child. The teacher educator programmes need to sensitize the teachers into understanding that though a bulk mode of instruction is being followed but still to reach out to every child and make the path of education successful individualised action plan is necessary and the tool for the future.

#### 4. INTENT AS THE PRIMAL FORCE IN STRUCTURING OF ALL CURRICULUM

With the society undergoing a continuous transformation due to rapid changes in the social, economic, political and international ethos, the aspirations and the consciousness of the society alter and education becomes one of the major sector which needs to change to fulfil the newer aspirations of the society. (Tarulli&Skott-Myer, 2006). The intent of the society may be much beyond the scope of internalisation in the educational programme, but it does bring forth newer policies in education and newer curriculum frameworks to showcase the necessary shift that the society now looks forward to. This topic is challenging because it questions the stringent subject boundaries, talk about intermingling or diluting them to lead to an interdisciplinary discourse which forms the true foundation of a realistic analytical perspective on the world and its imbed observations around.

This school of thought brings education to the domain of revolutionary existence, wherein both adults and children have to meaningfully derive sense of the chaos happening in the disorganised and non-peaceful world around, wherein energy and money is being spent on fulfilling ambitious self-centred political agendas rather than establishing an ethos of world peace and mutual growth (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999).

Dahlberg et al. (1999) emphasizes that it is the era in which the educational philosophy, educational institutions and the educational trainers needs to undergo a paradigm shift in terms of both the philosophy, the process and the pedagogy. These revolutionary ideas only pave the realistic path towards developing truly child participatory curriculum.

The educators and the teachers who traverse this road not taken and who wish to give the centralised power of the classroom in the hands of the children, who are the torch bearers of this movement, involve themselves in action research in the classroom and try to contemplate on diverse aspects namely organisation of the classroom space, classroom discourse, teaching resources, evaluation and reflective analysis. A cyclic continuum of planning, implementation, critical reflection and then re-planning to keep on developing the classroom discourse towards evolutionary higher and higher potential.

The role and perspective development of all the stakeholders is quintessential in this direction for sensitizing and creating support at all levels in this movement of change and truly empowering children on the grounds of participation. The meaning of participation of children which has seen a marginalised existence, rather majorly neglected and rudimentary in

the majority of schools, faces a traditional bloc which can only be transformed through conscious persistent efforts in this direction by all the stake holders.

### **5. REFLECTING ON THE POSSIBLE: AWAY FROM THE RESTRICTION OF ASSUMED IMPOSSIBLE**

Reflecting within the horizons of new educational policy and the new curriculum framework, will encourage all stakeholders to break stereotypes, come out of the stringent formalised schooling curricular structure and to bring in the necessary reforms to ensure an honest attempt in realisation of the child participatory curricular model. But the basic premise is the question that can these theoretical revolutionary ideas be really imbed into educational practice and how? Giving a goal is one thing, but contemplating whether the goal is realistic or not is another. Large number of professional development workshops are now being organised for in service teachers to facilitate them in modifying their teaching learning strategies to build up a truly learner centred, child participatory environment. But even the workshops and trainers cannot give a clear linear steps to be followed as they highly vary according to the social, emotional, psychological, geographical, linguistic and nationalistic barriers. The methodology of child participation that may be applicable for one of the groups, may not be valid for another set of students. We need to take children as living, thinking, active and reason abiding entities and not mere passive recipients of what is being taught to them in an undisputed manner. This of course, will initiate a vibrant branch of action research to cater to different types of kinaesthetic, intellectual, sensory and logic-reasoning individuals. Reaching out to each and every child based on his/her innate potential is of immense importance.

One of the revolutionary ideas in this direction is to involve children in all aspects of their curricular experiences (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987). We need to be open to include children's inputs in all aspects of their classroom structuring and unfolding (MacNaughton, 2004). This will undoubtedly cater and bring forth the need of diverse lesson plans with the aspect of unwavering flexibility suited to meet the growth needs of every child. Firstly understanding the child as an individual entity in a class group of around 40 in a limited time span of 40 minutes, with the syllabus constraints and the examination preparation to be done is a huge challenge in itself. Understanding the child to identify his strengths, his learning aptitude and study interest is the foremost crucial task and given the time frame it seems not smooth, but with perseverance, constant efforts and active role of all the stake holders towards one common goal, will serve as the necessary milestone in this direction.

Opposition and diverse opinions will definitely surface, as it is not a set of supporting roots all joining

to a tap root but it is a set of numerous fibrous roots which individually contribute to the bulk of the anchoring root system for the standing plant on the surface. These sets of fibrous roots inevitably symbolise the individual learning structure of a student and also the overall learning structure of an educational organisational ecosystem as well. The teachers and teacher educators of today need to reflect carefully on this 'fibrous root learning system' of the present times.

### **6. THE RAY OF HOPE: BUILDING A CHILD CENTERED – CHILD PARTICIPATORY CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN**

The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Children in a strong proposition has empowered the children with the right of expressing their opinions and getting involved, getting heard, and exercising choices in matter that involves them. This is a very strong legal constitutional provision, which makes it inevitable for all the stake holders to look at the children seriously from the viewpoint of centralising education emanating from them and encircling them. However, as discussed in the above sections, child participation is a webbed diversely interlinked structure in itself which requires a very broader understanding of the dynamic factors at play.

The spiral of the teaching learning experiences is built on the basic proposition wherein we consider the child as a complete entity in himself/herself, a capable person who is able to identify the problem, contemplate on the issue, analyse the diverse forces at play and present the best possible solutions. Of course, then through a dialogic way and diverse exposure activities children can be explained about diverse other solutions that a child didn't propose and which does seemingly can have better resolving abilities. The method to be employing is growing up together, wherein the teacher and the student together as one unit, analyse the problem at play and bring forth a collective solution, with the student as the team leader, leading and planning the whole unit's work. The era of the dominance of the teacher, the teacher centric education needs to take a conscious backseat. With the decentralisation of the teacher centric education only can the era of learner centred education emerge.

The classifying of children and their intellectual abilities on the basis of IQ Test, also need to be reflected upon as mechanical assessment of children and quantification of the ability attribute is not a complete reflection of the world of the child. The teacher needs to breathe in the living system of the child, understand the soil from which the roots of the child emerge, understand the type of roots which anchor the body of the plant, reflect on the type of venation, correlate it with the roots of the child, understand the type of flower the child blooms in, the



type of fruit it forms and the seed, which will be the living essence for further propagation of the unique self of the child.

This 'Biological structural model' forms a basic framework wherein the structural entity of the child can be understood and not be misled by physical numerical quantification of diverse attributes and potentialities in an individual (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). The psychometric testing and numerical assessments of children's unique potential and utilising it to govern the road ahead now needs to be carefully reflected upon and the child is to be seen as a complete entity its individual and community existence. This wholesome approach, which popularly lies in the domain of holistic education is the road ahead towards a successful child centred participatory curricular manifestation.

## 7. CONCLUDING IN THE WIDER INDIAN CONTEXT

The Indian Educational Diaspora is blooming with the fervour of a new age in the Indian schooling and higher education system. The relevance and the need to transform the Indian educational practices are now on the fore, with the coming of National Policy on Education (2020) and the National Curriculum Framework. The basic challenges mentioned in the Document itself which are serving as hindrances to the unwavering holistic growth of our children is the basic subjugation to the culture of rote learning, the challenges of instruction in a language that is not the mother tongue of the child, the alienation of the content experiences not in the familiar known environment of the child and the teacher centric classroom ethos. The policy document has accepted that due to the heavy examination oriented education system of our country, we as a nation are plagued with the coaching culture which has become the dominating education sector of our country.

All stake holders in the field of curriculum construction and development, in the wider ethos of developing child centric education, need to first look at the positioning of our children in the classroom. Right from the stage of planning, towards making a sequence of activities and theory, to the arena of evaluation and self-reflection, it all needs to have the prime most objective of bringing the child to the forefront so as to develop the inherent quality of responsibility, problem solving, team work and citizenship in them.

When the virtues of democratisation of education are being stressed, the educational community needs to understand that these virtues do not come at a specific vote giving age, but are actually a culmination of the experiences of the children throughout their formative schooling educational age. The positioning of children in the classroom, whether as the leader or the follower, the creator or the recipient of instructions, a passive adherer of the

classroom processes of whom he/she is a part of or an active designer of the best methodology to understand a topic well within the age appropriate domains.

The theories of child education and development have always emphasized on the importance of early childhood experiences and schooling processes in shaping the personalities, thought processes and wisdom of children so as to empower them to meaningfully and responsibly take up the dutiful adult roles of the future. Teachers, teacher educators and all the stake holders need to give the expansive opportunity of leading the classroom discourse in the hands of the children, so as to empower them with the true training of being the leaders of their life and the life of the community at large in the wisest, responsible, respectful and progressive way. The researches in the field of education and the policy documents serve as the guiding light to reflectively wisely position our children in the classroom, empowering their participation to take up adult roles with necessary wisdom.

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