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No Detention Policy – Why Do We Need It?

Sandhya Sangai*

Falling levels of achievement amongst children at the early stages of education has been bothering the planners and administrators of the education over a period of time. Having achieved universalisation of elementary education to a large extent, the quality of learning by children has been an issue which actually questions the achievement of universalisation of elementary education in a real sense. The reports of large scale achievement surveys, ASER, 2012 and NCERT achievement survey hints at the low levels of achievement amongst children of primary Classes. Often it is cited that children of class V are not able to read the text meant for class II level children. Such findings and revelations add to the worries of the education system and a whisper begins to spread 'where all the government money is going' Recently while exploring the factors which might be causing low level of learning by children, many stakeholders in

education pointed towards the 'No Detention Policy' (NDP) as a major reason for persistent bad quality of learning resulting in poor learning outcomes. The same voice came from so many quarters that a CABE Sub-committee was set up for Assessment and Implementation of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation in the context of the No Detention Policy in the RTE Act, 2009. This sub-committee was chaired by Smt. Geeta Bhukkal, Former Minister of Education, Govt. of Haryana. The major recommendation (not unanimous) of the sub-committee is to do away with the provisions of No Detention up to class VIII. Encouraged by this recommendation many groups including media got involved in heating up the discussion on the Non Detention Policy under the RTE Act. Many state governments started writing to the MHRD for an amendment in the RTE Act to detain children post Class III or V.

* Associate Professor, DEE, NCERT

While raising the argument, it was also realised that there was a dearth of researches and informed discussions which would have given a rationale for making or not making the amendment. This paper briefly presents the issues related to NDP which need a careful attention from the stakeholders to build up their opinion for retaining or rejecting or modifying the existing NDP.

No Detention Policy and the RTE Act, 2009

The RTE Act, 2009 provides a legal framework for article 21-A of the Indian Constitution. The article states that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. This is a significant step towards public provisioning of elementary education in India. There are two sections of the Act, section 16 and section 29 (2) (h) which are concerned with the 'No Detention of Child up to elementary classes' and 'Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation' of children's learning respectively. These two provisions have majorly attracted the discussions and several concerns are being raised.

The much-awaited Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, besides making education a fundamental right for children in the age group 6-14 years, also made it mandatory that "no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of

elementary education." It also proposed "Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation of a child's understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same" and said, "no child shall be required to pass any board examination till completion of elementary education."

— Disha Nawani, Learning beyond textbooks

Many members in several committees do not avoid commenting that children have become irresponsible and they do not want to study as they know that they are not going to lose anything by not studying. Teachers are also found blaming children and parents for poor achievements and falling quality of education in foundational years. Parents are also not left behind. They hold teachers responsible for not taking teaching seriously. This blame game continues and the child who is actually the victim of the entire game finally remains at the loss. My sister who is a primary school teacher once told me, when I was discussing with her the potential effects of NDP, that parents often ask children to take chhutti for petty reasons, e.g. if there is a marriage in the neighbourhood or there is some guest in the house. This attitude not only affects loss in terms of classroom experiences but also encourages children for not taking school seriously. According to my sister the parents of government school children do not hesitate doing it because they are sure that their child will be promoted to next class in any

case. She further tells that parents of private schools are not found doing it as they know that their child may have to face the consequences of not being regular. Such state of affairs has in fact tarnished the image of government schools. If we analyse the situation from child's point of view, it can be imagined that no child likes to be a non-achiever. They are most keen to show their potentials provided they get a nurturing environment. However right from the beginning if they stay in a non-stimulating environment where nobody is interested to make them achievers they also start losing self-esteem. Further they may lose the desire to achieve. In a situation like this, can we imagine that a child would ever be able to make efforts strong enough which will help him to come up and do well? Rather her mind would always be restless, not knowing how to go forward in the absence of support. The whole idea behind detention is to use fear as the only motivation for studying. This leads to students giving more importance to the process of examination rather than actual learning. We need to think, keeping in view the dwindleness in the mind of the child, whether detention will be an answer to this dismal situation.

...Non-detention till class VIII should not mean acceptance of shoddy levels of learning. The need of the hour is an educational revamp at class I level itself. Students need to be motivated to learn at an early age, thus developing a healthy attitude towards learning. Then, detention can be brought in to the

system from class IX onwards.

Archit Joshi, Non-Detention Policy-Valid Move

(September 07, 2015, The Week Magazine)

Archit Joshi, NON-DETENTION POLICY

Rationale behind NDP

The NDP was introduced to arrest the dropout rate as failure was identified the main reason for dropout and repeated failure have been the major challenges in providing universalizing of elementary education. Yashpal Committee Report 'Learning without Burden' and National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 developed by the NCERT are the major documents which speak on NDP and supporting assessment.

The NCF, 2005 has placed a lot of emphasis on school experiences and prior knowledge of the child. The conducive learning environment having a scope for discovery learning, exploring and activity based learning is a precondition for quality learning. There are so many other critical issues that affect learning. The Yashpal Committee Report comments that the teaching learning is dominated by examination system and merely the focus is on child's ability to reproduce the information, thus completely ignoring the ability of child to apply the knowledge gained and also other abilities which cannot be tested by a paper pencil test. The report says "Children receive the message almost

as soon as they start attending school that the only thing which matters is one's performance in the examination.

The NCERT, through NCF-2005, has invited the attention of policy framers to bring about systemic reforms in the assessment of children's learning. The position paper on examination reforms (NCERT, 2005) discusses a system of assessment which would be non-threatening and rather be a tool for learning. The Source Books on Assessment for classes I-V developed by the NCERT, for all curricular areas, signifies NCERT's resolve to provide to teachers and administrators a new vision and approach for assessing children's progress. The existing system discourage teacher for recognising the important role that a cooperative classroom culture plays in promoting learning. The recent documents brought out by the NCERT- *An Exemplar Package on CCE* (for the primary and upper primary classes) and *Learning Indicators and Learning Outcomes at the Elementary Stage* would provide lot of guidance to teachers as well as to parents and adults to observe learning progression in their children and help them in learning by organising different types of activities and games.

The objective of developing CCE Package has been to facilitate implementation of NDP in its true spirit. 'No detention' should not be taken for 'no assessment'. CCE should be the evaluation technique under NDP where assessment is 'for learning'. The NDP and CCE complement each other

and therefore must be seen together. In implementing CCE, the role of teachers becomes central to the entire process of teaching learning. However if we see the practical side of implementation of CCE, it is observed that teachers are worried and perplexed as they are required to complete lot of data and keep the records of each child's test scores. Instead of this laborious work they should rather be guided on how to integrate assessment with the teaching learning process as an essential component. Teachers generally consider CCE as an external activity, just contrary to the philosophy and spirit of CCE.

The past experiences have suggested that detention of students by a year or more does not improve learning. The Bhukkal Committee has also admitted that there is no research evidence that shows that repeating helps children perform better. But it does say that repeating has adverse academic and social effects on the child. Older system of failures and detention was recognised as detrimental to child's learning and motivation to learn. Teachers criticise NDP and CCE because they have not been given enough understanding about these and they are not aware about the philosophy behind these. In addition to these inhibiting factors, most of the teachers are not ready to experiment new ideas or solve problems having solutions within the classroom. Perhaps they also need mentoring for a relatively longer duration to implement CCE, modify

their pedagogic methods and improve children's learning levels. Parents are also found not adjusted with NDP and CCE as they are more familiar with promotions and detentions to calibrate their child's learning. Most of them do not try to know about CCE, they are sometimes not interested to get aware about the philosophy of CCE, principles behind it and how it can help to accelerate the learning pace of their children. Generally a lot of money is spent on the training and orientation of teachers but it is high time to organise awareness generation programmes for parents and involve them as responsible stakeholders for education of their children. In case of younger children, studying in primary and elementary classes, this becomes all the more necessary to create a congenial learning environment for the children.

Conclusion

The discussion above spells out that there is a need to carefully look at the issues inhibiting the desired implementation of NDP along with CCE. Both the policies are constructive and positive. Reward should work better than punishment and hence the situation calls for an intervention. The thinking behind bringing in the no- detention policy was perhaps that conduct of exams at times when children are in the process of building up their learning experiences and aspiring for a higher quality of life may be detrimental to their journey of education. The younger children

especially those belonging to the first generation of learners in their families always deserve a positive reinforcement and emotional support from adults, may be teachers or parents or others. The thinking that 'non-detention' policy has caused fall in the quality of elementary education is not justified. Perhaps the policy has not been understood in the right perspective. Most of the teachers believe that a certain quality can be maintained only when the class has no 'low achievers', again a matter of their own perception. Is it not the time when instead of blaming poor children and their parents, the teachers realise their duty and be ready to show tangible proof of what they have accomplished. A teacher's job is to help the children learn by creating a stimulating and non-threatening environment. This is of course a challenging job but at the same time it is a sacred mission for a teacher. If the teacher succeeds in his job, there will be no need to fail a child.

The urge to bring back the detention policy may not assure the expected improvement rather it may push children who are not promoted to next class to withdraw from the system due to demotivation. It is doubtful whether detention is the only solution to improve the learning levels of children as those who would be detained would not know what to do and how to come back. The solutions may be seen in terms of better implementation of NDP and CCE with a dialogue with teachers, reducing the rules for filling up too many recording

proformas, encouraging children to participate in learning process, involving the community and parents whole heartedly and sharing with them the responsibilities of learning by

children. Keeping the child's interest in the focus, having trust and faith in them and respect for their dignity would help every child feel comfortable in the journey of their educational life.

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