**SNC: time for solutions**

Taimur K Bandey

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If nothing else the debate over the Single National Curriculum (SNC) has forced many to talk, engage and research about education. It has compelled everyone to become a self-proclaimed educationist and issue their edicts vehemently. I for one am happy that it has brought out the much needed and largely missing focus on education in Pakistan. However, it is now time to work towards solutions.

The debates leading up to this have been very interesting and informative. Both the for and the against camps argued – some through rhetoric, emotions and hearsay and some via facts, data and reason. Which side did what should now be history and one needs to come out with a roadmap for the future.

Thanks to social media this is the first time in almost 75 years that we, as a nation, are scanning our education. Many strong suggestions and valid criticisms have been raised. The most glaring ones mention too much overall content for primary year students, excessive religiosity in English and Urdu books and tacit and built-in sexism, misogyny and poor imaging of women in the text books. While we await a formal qualitative and quantitative research on the SNC, many educationists have gone through the books and raised a few alarm bells. This curriculum will not only impact the much attacked private-school sector, it will definitely also leave an imprint on the vast public school arena and the sensitive madrassah school system.

While many constantly talk about the Cambridge system as a benchmark to compare the local system with, I would like to suggest a deeper understanding of the International Baccalaureate (IB) system. IB is a holistic, inclusive and modern system in its approach. It is a concept, not content, based system. IB does not have a curriculum and one can teach any content through the IB mechanism. It primarily works on the skills of the learner and teaches subjects in an integrated manner in its primary years. The system has inquiry based learning, outcome based teaching and a student agency model built into it. All of this can be phased into our local system in a very well mapped out pattern – this being a long-term strategy and one that may take several governments to implement it.

While we develop a teaching framework and a teacher training programme in a fast-paced pipeline, we can devise curriculum framework, assessment criteria and academic policies at a slower pace. Here we sign post a series of short-term plans leading up to a long-term agenda.

This will surely be a major shift in approach and something not easy to implement. I am going to list down some of the salient features for everyone to study and question so that we could take the debate ahead.

One, we request universities to give us feedback on what they feel is missing from school graduates and we take their first year content and do a backward mapping in school (grade 12 down to Pre School). We seek university content for all the major subjects and work our way back to the early years. In primary years (pre-school till class 5) we teach them every core subject (English, Urdu, Science, Mathematics, Social studies etc). We only integrate through planners that combine a maximum of 10-15 percent of the content in major subjects (three to four maximum) and teach the selected content from the selected subjects under one topic/ theme. The rest can be standalone content and subjects.

Two, we partner with Ed Tech companies and cellular phone companies to take education far and wide.

Three, based on research we reduce content-heavy curriculum and make it more concept-based education where the focus remains on understanding the idea behind a concept by learning through experience, learning through play and various other traditional and non-traditional forms.

Four, we add the idea of research, presentations, thinking skills, critical thinking etc through various tasks and exercises. This will of course vary from school to school but the core elements of these 21st century skill sets will be taught in every school.

Five, we make our classroom learning inquiry based and so prepare assessments and teacher trainings around this very concept.

Six, children are taught academic honesty, inclusiveness based on gender, religion, sect, ethnicity etc).

Seven, we create a special needs policy and allow schools (if possible) to have at least two differently-abled kids study with them. Again this will vary from school to school and will not be imposed but highly encouraged.

Eight, modified learning and assessments and not uniform teaching and standard assessments to take place. This again can be made possible in a large class of students where teaching and tasks will shift from content based to concept based.

Nine, children will not have exams till the end of class 5. There will be various forms of formative and summative assessments which will be done orally, through illustrations, presentations, group work, task-oriented and even in written forms. A grading/ assessment criteria will be made as well under an assessment policy.

Ten, schools will be free to impart physical education, art, music, drama, computer science, chess etc based on their financial situation and ideology.

Eleven, all books will be scanned for gender sensitivities and religious content in all non-Islamiat subjects through a qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Twelve, religion or religious teaching will be strictly restricted to Islamiyat alone. Thirteen, private school curriculum will become a benchmark for all schools to follow.

Fourteen, a very strong structure of master trainers and trainers will be made for a teacher training programme. Fifteen, non-Muslim and regional heroines/ heroes will be added by respective provinces. Sixteen, regional languages can be added by provinces.

Seventeen, the loose framework will allow schools to use any book, as the final standard of academic excellence will matter and not how schools reach a certain expected level. Eighteen, this will form the foundation for a middle years programme for classes 6 to 8 and then beyond.

Nineteen, a compulsory and a more broad-based and non-religious/nationalist life skills curriculum will be added to focus on human rights, minority rights, women rights and ideas like consent, harassment, reproductive health, puberty, gender, body protection, violence etc.

I understand that the first words that come to mind after going through these concepts are ‘wishful thinking’. I also acknowledge the walk from paper to implementation and application of the above will be very hard, especially for the remote, overstuffed and less privileged schools of the country. This is certainly a long haul in terms of implementation. Most of these suggestions are very technical in nature and need much more detailed explanations. I am assuming educationists may have a lot of queries and thoughts on this. The idea was to lay down a raw base which can be hammered and chiseled to a more definitive shape.

I am hoping that the discussion now moves towards a solution-oriented deliberation. This is surely going to be a paradigm shift and a move in the direction of a more modern and futuristic education system.

The writer is an educationist and International baccalaureate (IB) consultant.

Twitter: @TBandey