

## **Last Word**

As I write this article, CBSE-NCERT has “rationalised” textbooks, omitting vital chapters and paragraphs of information from Science, Mathematics and Social Science. Perhaps next, the dictionary needs to modify the meaning of “rationalise” to “make easy”. Learning any new concept or skill usually takes one outside the comfort zone of the familiar and easy. To remove important concepts from the syllabus on the ground of difficulty is to reduce the learning challenge for the current generation of students and also limit the goal of learning solely to scoring high in examinations.

As someone who has been in teaching-learning all my life as student and teacher, I would disagree with this narrow, utilitarian goal of learning. I would argue instead, for the development of the Multiple Intelligences (MI) as one of the aims of learning, and for the learning process to follow the cognitive scale of Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (RBT), beginning with the Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) of Knowledge, Understanding and Application, which in turn enable the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) of Analysis, Evaluation and Creativity. I would connect Creativity at the apex of the RBT hierarchy to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘Flow’ or total creative engagement with the subject, when the learner attains creative mastery of the subject. Grades and other external incentives become irrelevant, for this is the level at which artists produce masterpieces and scientists achieve breakthrough with new inventions and discoveries. At school level, students discover the joy of autonomous learning when in a state of Flow.

The bureaucrats who govern CBSE and their political masters, however, have little to do with this universal perspective of learning. The bureaucrats are the products of the competitive exam system and naturally, stand by it to the extent of confusing assessment with learning, and marks and grades with learning outcomes – not so much in word as in deed. The CBSE manuals and published articles proclaim learning for real life as their purpose, in accordance with National Education Policy 2020 but CBSE diktat at syllabus level tends towards making exams predictable and thus, easy to score 100% marks. Sadly, this has also become the sole target of students and teachers in Classes 10 and 12. The Ministry of Education too, seems to prefer conditioning our future citizens via “rationalised” rote learning not to think independently, nor persevere in overcoming any intellectual challenge, contrary to their publicly proclaimed goals.

The coaching industry, with its strong lobby and exponentially ramifying presence, benefits from this “rationalisation”. It has already reduced many CBSE (and even State Board) schools to “dummy” status, i.e. to fielding AISSE and AISSCE candidates who never actually attend school. These “dummy” students do not have time to attend regular school because instead, they prepare for the JEE (engineering) or NEET (medical) entrance examinations, with varying degrees of ultimate success. Now, with the newly “rationalised” syllabus, they need spend even less time preparing for the CBSE Class 10 and Class 12 exams. A large number of schools, students and parents are complicit in this racket and the resulting learning outcome could not be any further removed from MI, RBT, Flow or any other advanced, tried and tested learning theories.

This scenario, with the Education Ministry and CBSE declaring aims, processes and outcomes from the latest research in education technology, while actually enabling a totally different focus in learning and assessment, brings to mind the doublespeak propaganda of dystopian fiction and imbues the term “rationalisation” with sinister political implications. I end on this negative note, because the solution requires parents, students, teachers, schools and education policy makers to act in unison to save school learning from the looming abyss, which collaboration at present remains only a remote possibility.

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