



All is now fair in India's ailing pedagogic spaces

Context:

1. The novel coronavirus has turned our ailing pedagogic spaces topsy-turvy. All is now fair and there are no fouls. And in any case, there is no referee.
2. Reconciling the new technological environment with child psychology and educational theory has not been easy.
3. Though there is no worthwhile evidence that smart classes contribute to intellectual development, both private and government schools have installed 'smart' infrastructure at great expense.

The pandemic and pressures

1. The novel coronavirus pandemic has created its own pressure on the education sector. Response to this pressure reflects the poor systemic capacity to adapt to unforeseen situations.
2. Spaces available for deliberation and working out details have always been quite limited, and academic advice has had only a marginal role.
3. The feeling that there is no alternative to going online erased the need to make stage-wise distinctions and age-specific provisions. Nor was there any scope for assessing the situation in rural schools region-wise.
4. For the vast population of children who had no access to laptops, smartphones were hailed as a substitute. They were distributed in some States on the assumption that they would remain useful for a long time.
5. The usual rush to start the new session left no time to consider the implications of children's unbounded access to the Internet and their increasing facility with the smartphone.

No safety net for children

Childhood is now fully exposed to the attractions of the virtual world and there is no one to offer a safety net. Young children's access to the Internet brings them face to face with self-styled video teachers of every subject, manufacturers of video games, fantasy app makers, and coding instructors. These and many others have successfully penetrated the armour that the family and the school used to provide.



The fascination of precocity and Competition

1. Provision of a hands-on experience and the reading of printed material remained undisturbed in primary schools even under pandemic conditions in European countries, Japan and China.
2. Online teaching was perceived only as a supplement, that too for older children.
3. Stage-wise specificity of appropriateness is seldom given serious consideration in our system. The general logic currently applied is that if digital resources are useful for higher classes, why not induct the youngest age group in online learning?
4. Respect for the natural pace of intellectual maturation and the importance of hands-on experience have enjoyed universal currency.
5. Over the recent years, acceleration of learning, outcome-driven teaching and frequent testing emerged as parts of a new ideology in education.
6. The modern schooling system has introduced and propagated a culture of competitiveness. Parents want to see their child moving ahead of others.
7. Children internalise this desire early and teachers encourage it despite what they learn during their training about individual differences in pace and style of learning.

True to its name

Precaution

The Drugs Controller General of India has taken the greatly reassuring decision to seek additional safety and immunogenicity data from the Pune-based Serum Institute of India and Hyderabad's Bharat Biotech even for emergency use approval rather than an early roll-out of vaccines that have not been sufficiently studied.

Lack of sufficient Data

The decision to seek more evidence would mean a slight delay in locally manufactured vaccines becoming available. By keeping the approval on hold pending more evidence, the expert committee has done much to generate trust in

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the regulator's uncompromising approval process even for emergency use in the midst of the pandemic. However, these manufacturers have unfortunately come out as being in a hurry to seek approval without sufficient data to support their case. Bharat Biotech's rush to seek approval is of concern as the company had not submitted any data from its phase-3 trial but relied entirely on the interim safety and immunogenicity data of the phase-1 and phase-2 trials.

Conclusion:

Indian manufacturers should strive to carry out the trials to the highest ethical standards and submit comprehensive data such that emergency use approval is a sure shot. Any further haste shown in seeking approval for emergency use may turn detrimental and the companies may even run the risk of losing public trust.