NURTING LEARNER AUTONOMY: A CASE OF CONTINUOUS COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

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Multifarious behavioural objectives, plurality of learning experiences, activity-based learning process, competency-oriented different modes of assessment, and multiple ways of expressing and interpreting learner’s attainment characterising Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation should inherently be integrated with and guided by some basic principles of freedom, flexibility, plurality, continuity and consistency. Practising this process from the beginning and other higher levels of schooling may nurture autonomy in student-learners and subsequently yield the same with diversified areas and range at higher education level for truly empowering him/her how to learn, how to learn with joys and how to grow with challenges.

Threats to Learner Autonomy: A Contextual Background
Cognition-oriented and textbook-based evaluation; use of number as single measure to capture and rank achievements in disparate dimensions of education such as acquisition of information, knowledge construction, training of mental abilities, potential to perform a specific task, development of competency, and development of character; monotonous use of achievement tests to perform some rituals for evaluating learners; carelessness in preparation of test items with inadequate weightage to instructional objectives and even in some cases ignorance of the taxonomy of these objectives; construction of test items without sufficient knowledge about, or any concern for item writing principles; erratic valuation of answer scripts as reflected in narrow discrepancy between marks assigned to bright learner and slow learner; and thereby making sole attempt to measure the immeasurable and to provide an illusion of certainty question the utility and relevance of the existing system of evaluation across
different levels of education in India. Evaluation continues to follow the principle of ‘one size fits all’ with emphasis on single type of syllabus, knowledge dominated content, acquiring mind, data surfing, teacher-directed learning, note-taking learning, competitive learning, paper-pencil type of test, long type test item, group testing, and fixed schedule examination. It tends to reveal the level of threat to the autonomy of learner.

How to restructure evaluation so that it can empower learner to be the owner of his/her learning experiences through creation of learning environment, participation in learning processes, development of critical thinking and creative power, conversion of ability to skill and competency and self-evaluation of one’s own ability and performance?

How to transform evaluation to be continuous and comprehensive one so that it can develop in student-learners a sense of emancipation from the teacher’s classroom dictum and for increasingly becoming independence and responsible, taking self-initiative, building confidence, involving in learning process, improving upon one’s potential and skill, and creating new ideas?

Learner Autonomy: What is it?
Learner autonomy implies learner’s growing independence and responsibility. One does not become autonomous; one only works towards autonomy. It is learned at least partly through plurality of experiences. Learner autonomy is thus a process, not a product. It is rightly pointed out by Thanasoulas (2013) who says: “Learner autonomy is a perennial dynamic process amenable to ‘educational interventions’ (Candy, 1991), rather than a static product, a state, which is reached once and for all”. Learner autonomy too refers to his/her self-direction in learning, ability to assume greater control over his/her own learning, ‘ability to take charge of one’s learning’ (Holec, 1981: 3, as cited in Thanasoulas, 2013), or ‘capacity to control or oversee her/his own learning’ (Dam, 1990, as cited in Thanasoulas, 2013).
What does Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation mean?

**Evaluation:** Evaluation is a process that includes collecting information or evidences about learner’s behaviour during the instruction, interpreting such information or evidences, making judgement about behaviour based on information or evidences, and taking appropriate decision about learner’s course and career.

**Continuous Evaluation:** Continuous evaluation refers to continuity, regularity and periodicity of evaluation of learner during instruction of an academic session. One has to decide, of course, that how frequently and with what frequency a learner should be assessed.

**Comprehensive Evaluation:** Comprehensive evaluation includes (i) instructional objectives to be included in evaluating learner, (ii) areas of evaluation including scholastic and co-scholastic learning experiences to be provided to the learner, (iii) techniques and tools of evaluation employed for evaluating learner in both scholastic and co-scholastic areas, (iv) nature and types of items of evaluation techniques and tools, (v) ways of expressing learner’s attainment and (vi) types of interpretations of learner’s attainment.

Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is thus a process of assessing the learner’s behaviour regularly and periodically in both scholastic and co-scholastic areas during instruction of an academic session through a variety of tools and techniques. It is a developmental process of assessing the learner under the entire range of instructional objectives.

**Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation as tool of Learner Autonomy**

The shift of learning responsibility from teachers to learners does not exist in a vacuum, rather in certain context. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is the context. It is one of the
interventions to provide multifarious opportunities and create favourable ground for nurturing and flourishing autonomy in learner. As an intervention, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation provides opportunities to the learner to be aware of and experience in its interwoven components comprising multifarious behavioural objectives, plurality of learning experiences, activity-based learning process, competency-oriented different modes of assessment, and multiple ways of expressing learner’s attainment, i.e. potential and competency and its interpretation at early stage of school education. Such plurality of opportunities, knowledge and experiences critically analysed below can foster independence, responsibility, self-confidence, self-direction and a sense of joy in learner and gradually develops in her/him the ability to assume greater control over his/her own learning.

1. Multifarious instructional objectives: Instructional objectives are the desired behaviours of a learner which he/she develops after undergoing some specific instruction. The instructional objectives in the forms of six classes of behaviour such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation outlined in Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, or Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001, cited in Guthrie, 2012:30) such as remembering (recalling relevant knowledge), understanding (explaining ideas or concepts), acting (using information in another situation), analysing (breaking material into parts to explore understandings and relationships), evaluating (making judgements), and creating (generating new ideas and patterns), or Marzano and Kenndall’s (2007) new taxonomy of educational objectives such as retrieval (recognising, recalling, and executing), comprehension (integrating, and symbolizing), analysis (matching, classifying, generalizing, and specifying), knowledge utilization (decision-making, problem solving, and experimenting), meta-cognition (specifying goals, monitoring progress towards goal, and monitoring accuracy), and self-system thinking (examining
importance, efficacy, and motivation) should be integrated with a wide range of learning experiences in varying degree from lower to higher level of school education facilitated by the teachers to the learner. These behavioural objectives should encapsulate multidimensional personality of the learner with the inclusion of his/her ‘intellectual, physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual development for the attainment of the respective educational objectives of knowledge, skills, vision, balance, and identity and also for promoting the respective universal values of truth, righteous conduct, love, peace and non-violence’ (S. B. Chavan Committee, 1999:2) through both scholastic and co-scholastic areas of study.

2. Plurality of learning experiences: Comprehensive learning experiences comprising of (1) cognition-oriented core scholastic areas of languages, mathematics, environmental science, social science with definite time slots and specific instructional guidelines; and (2) co-scholastic activities consisting of (a) curricular areas of (i) physical and health education such as sports, games, drill and yoga, (ii) art and craft education such as music, songs, dance, drama and artistic handicrafts, (iii) work education/experience such as gardening, flowering, clay modelling, tailoring and doll making, (iv) human rights and gender studies, (v) financial marketing management, (vi) mass media studies and/or any other local-specific areas with fixed time slots and specific instructional guidelines in the psychomotor domain, and (b) co-curricular activities such as personal and social qualities comprising willingness to learn, sense of responsibility, positive attitude, aptitudes (potentiality in vocal music, instrumental music), interests (debate, dance, NCC, NSS, Scouting, Red Cross), beliefs (self, almighty), values (cleanliness, respect, co-operation, punctuality, righteousness conduct, responsiveness, commitment, courage, perseverance), soft skills (flexibility, confidence, ethics, openness to experiences, inter-personal skills, community spirit, leadership), health habits such as brushing teeth, taking bath, combing hair, washing hands before and after taking food, and zest for life
without any fixed time slots and specific guidelines for instruction as well as without any fear of losing examination, results and certificate in the affective domain should progressively be left open to the learner to franchise some freedom to choose any for learning. Syllabus of any subject may be more than one. For mathematics, it may be standard one and another of at higher level. Understanding and communicating level syllabus and standardised literary analysis syllabus may be in language subjects. In addition, study of self-initiative activities in scholastic and/or co-scholastic areas by the learner should be encouraged. The learner should be formally taught thinking abilities (logical thinking, analogical thinking, problem solving, lateral thinking), creative potentialities (originality, flexibility, fluency, elaboration, transformation, forecasting outcomes, ability to regress), listening skills (hearing with patience to what others say, communicating self with clarity, responding well to others), reflective questions, and self-learning methods (web-source reading, textbooks other than prescribed ones, peer interaction, interaction with significant others such as teachers, parents and subject experts, hands-on-experience) to visualize the scope of his/her development. The entire range of learning experiences and opportunities should be comprehensive aiming at all round development of the learner by strengthening his/her independent thinking competency and leading him/her to the power of autonomy.

3. Activity-based learning process: Learning should take place through classroom transactional processes using constructivist instructional approaches such as Jigsaw strategy, peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching and classroom discussions; pupils’ active participation in class work; and assigning group project, individual project and home works. These processes mainly focus in developing pupils’ ability not what to learn but how to learn and how to learn in cooperation and with collaboration. The learning processes not learning outcomes are therefore of prime importance for nurturing the autonomy of the learner. However, learner’s
autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant; abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the learning process. Rather, teacher should involve with learner’s learning as partner (working along with small groups of students as partner in teaching-learning process in the form of co-operative learning), mediator (encouraging and supporting learner so as to maximize the ability to take responsibility for learning) and facilitator (creating enriched environments and activities for linking new information to prior knowledge, offering a multiplicity of authentic learning tasks for collaborative work and problem solving) that serve as the basic determinants for quality improvement in education. This activity-based learning process may develop in learner an enquiring mind with acquisition of facts (information), processing information (knowledge), processing information with judiciousness (wisdom): acquiring, knowing, and becoming.

4. Competency-oriented modes of assessment: Textbook-based and content-based testing which encourages cramming, rote memorisation and recall, and results in stressful and anxiety-prone life should be replaced with problem-solving and competence-based testing for progressively developing higher order thinking and competencies, and joyful learning (Learning Without Burden, 1993; and National Curriculum Framework 2005, 2005). Testing therefore should encompass different modes of assessment: (a) written tests such as unit test and term test with allotment of some extra time for reading questions before attempting and some more to revisit the answers after examination time and allowing restricted materials of basic tables and formulae along with calculator, (b) oral questions/viva-voce test, (c) open book examination of without time limit that emphasizes interpretation and application of learning, (d) observation of student’s participation in routine learning activities and exercises in and outside the classroom for assessing what he/she learns and how he/she improves, (e) activity-based test/experiment-based practical, and (f) rating scale, check list and observation schedule for assessing
student’s personal and social qualities, aptitudes, interests, beliefs, values, soft skills, healthy habits and zest for life. Concept-based than quiz type questioning (Learning Without Burden, and National Curriculum Framework 2005) in the form of (i) open-ended/supply-type questions such as essay type of about 10/08 marks, short type of 05/04 marks, very short type of 03/02 marks or/and sentence completion of 02/01 marks that can provide a base of gaining confidence in one’s ability to answer and solve problem, and (ii) closed-ended/selection-type questions such as multiple choice, matching, and alternative response (yes-no/true-false/right-wrong) of 02/01 marks covering progressively and increasingly from knowledge-based to creative-based behaviour may be employed. Instead of once-for-all testing annually there should be wide scope for assessing learner continuously and comprehensively at different times (asking questions and giving small assignments in classroom, timely completion of project, test at a short notice, weekly/monthly/bi-monthly formative evaluation, unit completion summative evaluation, half-yearly summative evaluation) of any academic session that can provide a cumulative dispassionate but factual judgement about the learner’s performance. Self-appraisal system and peer-appraisal system may be used to build self-confidence and courage for self-appraisal of his/her proficiency in course content as well as personal and social qualities. The evaluation tools have to be wide-ranging.

5. **Medium of expressing learner’s attainment:** Numerical scores (marking) along with symbolic marks (grading) on a seven or nine point scale in the scholastic areas and grading on a seven or nine point scale in co-scholastic areas along with some motivating and encouraging verbal descriptors (interpretation) may be assigned to the learner’s academic profile i.e., ability and competency. The verbal descriptors should be ‘factual and dispassionate rather than passing judgement on the individual learner and should be directed towards positive and constructive action. It should emphasize his/her assets and should be oriented towards remedial
action when achievement falls below than expectancy’ (Thorndike and Hagen, 1977: 565-600).

6. **Multiple ways of interpreting learner’s attainment:**
Learner’s attainment in terms of marks and grades should be interpreted within a wide frame of reference: (i) reference to the learner’s potential to perform not to ascertain whether a learner does the best he/she can (not for ascertaining level of over-achievement and under-achievement) rather what he/she can do, current status (ii) reference to the perfection i.e., criteria, expected level of learning, level of complete mastery (Thorndike and Hagen, and Stanley and Hopkins, 1972: 303-319) and (iii) reference to the group i.e., specific class group, or institution, status in the group/institution (Thorndike and Hagen). Thus, not a single mark and/or grade in a subject and single overall percentage and/or grade rather multiple alphanumeric performance indicators reflects the potential and competency of the learner. This can give him/her space to breath, scope to develop and further.

**EPILOGUE**
It may be observed from the preceding analysis that multifarious instructional objectives, wide-ranging learning experiences, activity-based learning process, competency-oriented multiple modes of assessment, and multiple ways of expressing and interpreting learner’s attainment are inherently integrated with and guided by some basic principles of flexibility, plurality, freedom, continuity and consistency. Following this practice from the very beginning of schooling and continuing at other higher levels may nurture autonomy in the learners and subsequently yield the same with diversified areas and range at higher education level for empowering him/her how to learn, how to learn with joys and how to grow with challenges. In this context It is worth noting the remark of National Focus Group on Examination Reforms (2006:5): “... if you want inquiring minds who can ‘think out of the box’ at
the age of 21, you cannot begin to create them at age of 17. You have to begin at 7, or at least at 11”.

Successful manipulation of continuous and comprehensive evaluation in the process of nurturing autonomy in learners greatly depends if it follows bottom-up approach developed and acted upon by the teachers, so far not truly followed in the Indian system of education, than top-down approach forced by the policy makers. It is mostly due to teacher education programmes which have failed to develop such professional competency and commitment among the teacher masses to effectively participate in such evaluation. Therefore the process of continuous and comprehensive evaluation has to be preceded by providing (a) theoretical knowledge about the concept of continuous and comprehensive evaluation, integration of scholastic areas and co-scholastic areas of study, typology of questions, level and nature of questioning, marking and grading, and types of thinking and creative abilities and strategies for nurturing such abilities as well as (b) technical- and competency-based learning experiences on developing techniques and tools of evaluation, items of evaluation tools and principles of their construction, administration of tools, how to conduct observation, transforming performance to numeric scores and interpretation of results to the teacher-trainees and teachers through respective pre- and in-service teacher education programmes. These theoretical knowledge and technical- and competency-based learning experiences in the form of Bridge Course should be provided through the existing provision of 20 days in-service course for all teachers each year, 60 days refresher course for untrained teachers already employed as teachers, and 30 days orientation for freshly trained recruits under the prevailing Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Or these knowledge, skills and competencies in the form of learning outcomes should be re-ascertained through at least six months of effective internship in a school after qualifying the currently introduced Teacher Eligibility
Test (TET) and before becoming eligible for entering into the teaching profession, the mother of all professions.

REFERENCES