

Business Standard

No detention is the worst thing that can happen to a child: Aditi Misra

Aditi Misra speaks to Anjali Bhargava on the changes being considered at policy level

Anjali Bhargava | New Delhi June 11, 2017 Last Updated at 14:45 IST



Aditi Misra

kind of approach.

People were very skeptical to begin with but as an educator, I saw this as a way for students to explore new talents. When art became a compulsory part of the evaluation, instead of making them all do art, we decided to get students to appreciate art. Let the child not draw if that's not what excites him. Teach them about various artists, teach them about various forms of art, folk art – they should be able to see a Madhubani and identify it. They should be able to identify a Jamini Roy or a Monet. The artists who live in Delhi, let's call them over.

The teachers took to it like a fish to water. We did this for music. Let the students not say “kuchh tun tun baj raha tha”; let them identify a sitar, tanpura, a violin – all the string instruments from one another. Everybody cannot dance but let them know the difference between kathak and bharatnatyam or modern dancing from ballroom!

The second thing that made me very hopeful was that my kids who were struggling with a pen and paper test suddenly started doing better with comprehensive and continuous evaluation (CCE). Any assessment pattern had two parts to it; one was the regular pen and paper test but the other half was more creative with elements of art, brochure making, street play – anything. So many who scored less in the pen and paper made up partly in the second bit. It made them feel so good about themselves. I didn't let them do the projects at home because otherwise we find parents are doing them instead of the children so we never fell into that trap.

Aditi Misra, 56, a career teacher with 32 years of experience now heads the Delhi Public School in Gurugram with 6000 plus students. A seasoned academician, Misra spoke to *Anjali Bhargava* on the changes being considered at the policy level for school education and what she thinks needs to be done. Excerpts from an interview:

What do you think of the reintroduction of the tenth board examinations and what are your views on CCE?

Reintroduction of the Board exam in class 10 was what the majority of parents, students, teachers and principals wanted!

As a school and as an educator, I felt doing away with the board was an opportunity to try a different

So for us it came like a breath of fresh air. We didn't let go of the rigor of academics but we managed to make it more fun, hands-on and child friendly for the students.

Then why hasn't it worked better?

There is a set of teachers, principals, parents and children who feel only the pen and paper thing works and nothing else. The mind-set is yet to change. There was a lot of training by the CBSE but not enough could appreciate its full benefits, I think.

I also found some were closed to the idea in a sense. Remember, CCE also means a lot more work for the teachers for the same remuneration.

Perhaps some parents and educators also saw the CCE as a way of removing 'rigour'. There was a concern that how would these students withstand the rigour of higher education.

A few years ago, there was a meeting of principals, 40-50 teachers and around 80 children with the last CBSE head. Students were picked out from among those who wrote to give feedback to CBSE. One of our students also attended this and he came back and said that everybody at the meeting wanted the board examination back. One of the reasons was that if they didn't have the tenth board, then 12th became the first serious external board and a lot hinges on it. So they'd rather have a go at it earlier.

We had quite a few children in jitters over the 12th board but then we had many in jitters on the 10th board too. So there was hard and fast rule but yes, in general, we found that the students were more confident when they had been through one board experience.

What is your view on no detention?

That I think is the worst thing that can happen to a child and to a school. I prefer not to call it detention; I call it giving a second chance. So if they have not cleared Class 3 and you push the child into the next class, it's very much like building an edifice with a very weak foundation. It is going to crumble one day.

So either we should say no detention till Class 12 – everyone will be very happy; our happiness quotient will beat Bhutan probably! But we should not say no detention till a certain class... after which detention comes into force!

Many students clear their year with dismal scores. It may be better for them to actually stay back and grasp concepts rather than just being pushed on with compromised levels of understanding.

A senior school student is dealing with hormones, mood swings, all kinds of other changes and then we say, well you have failed also (something you had seen coming and she or he didn't). It can break a child's spirit. It's still under debate but I do think this needs a serious relook.

Why are so many students moving to international boards – leaving ICSE and CBSE?

This happens in more affluent schools but yes there is a trend of people moving away from the Indian boards.

We see two kinds who are moving. One is the parent who is globally mobile – here today, in another country tomorrow. They need to have continuity. KVs and DPS in a sense all over India give continuity. So parents who are mobile globally are choosing boards where they will find good schools no matter where they are based.

The second kind of parent is one who is very sure he is sending his child overseas to study. While children can easily go out – and are in larger and larger numbers - even with ICSE and CBSE but where these curriculums are preferred is that they offer greater flexibility. In our system the trend is to follow a certain stream of subjects. So, someone in humanities can't do physics with it or one who has to do science can't drop chemistry and do

history instead. So a child doing IB can take a greater variety in subjects. It's a more rounded and wholesome approach.

Do you manage to get good teachers – quality is an issue all over India.

Yes, this is a big struggle. Anybody with good English skills, coming from a good background and a reasonable education at 27-28 today can easily earn Rs 1 lakh or so a month. A teacher starts off at Rs 30,000 with similar qualifications!

Having said that, teaching is a vocation. People who are passionate about teaching, mentoring children and enjoy being with children should get into this profession!

I worked as hard as a primary rated teacher though I earned Rs 1200 per month!

But I can't tell you how happy I was. It is something I really wanted to do.

I admit I don't always get the kind of teachers that I would like. But we like to choose teachers who are willing to learn, love children and have an open mind. The rest is easy... a series of in-service trainings do the job.