

## Open the Black Box

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Quest for quality in education has been a concern with policy makers, teachers, parents and learners for a long time. This quest is reflected in the various Educational Reforms, School Effectiveness Programs and endeavours to measure school effectiveness. Internationally some of these programs are PISA, establishing national, state, and district standards; target setting; enhanced programs for the external testing of students' performance; surveys such as NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) and TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study). In India, the attempts are observed in Operation Blackboard, DPEP Programs, the MLL initiative, the SSA etc.. Various initiatives in the same pursuit are more emphasis on school planning and management; and more frequent and thorough inspection.

A common thrust of these attempts is to search for quality in the obvious and the observables, that is, the learning outcomes and achievement of the learners. A view of the inside of the school also needs to be taken as some answers may be found there. Raising the standards of learning in schools is an important step in the quest for quality. The focus needs to be on the processes that occur in the school. Hitherto not much explored, the inside of school is still a 'Black Box' (William and Black, 1998 ).What are the attributes of the essential teaching learning process that occurs in school and how it can be improved is the concern of the authors. Without entering into the realm of **either or** of the product versus process perspective, the authors present strategies for enriching the teaching learning process especially from the perspective of assessment.

### **Primacy of the learner**

The endeavour of the school is the development of the learner for various purposes as its primary objective. The constructivist paradigm, advocated by National Curriculum Framework, 2005, places the learner at the centre of the activities in teaching learning process. Active learning and learner as active participant in the process of learning is an integral part of the constructivist approach to learning. It is essential to note that constructivism is an approach to learning rather than a teaching theory. Learning in schools is driven by what teachers and pupils do in classrooms. The process thus, assumes greater importance than the product. How learning process should be designed so that the learner is an active participant? One of the ways is that the learner is able to identify his/her learning needs and determine the extent to which these are met with. What should the environment be for such a process, what should the role of teacher be in this process and what assessment techniques are to be employed which assures the primacy of the learner in the learning process, are some questions that need to be addressed.

### **Primacy of assessment**

The evolving design of the learning process, as against the pre design, accords a central place to assessment. When information is fed into the learning process and to the learners in a way that enables them to learn is formative assessment. This information can be obtained by and provided by teachers. It can also be obtained by learners themselves by engaging in self reflective process. Formative assessment thus plays a crucial role in the process as it provides a reliable data for making the learning process an informed one. If

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