



How right is the **RTE?**

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 is a landmark legislation that provides the framework for the removal of all financial and psychological impediments to ensure that all children between the ages of 6–14 have access to education. In 2012, the Supreme Court followed up this legislation with a ruling that 25 per cent of all seats in private schools be reserved for children from disadvantaged sections of society.

In response to the above, certain sections of the society raised questions as to whether —

- ❑ This reservation would be implemented by private schools in spirit or simply to the letter
- ❑ The reservation will actually benefit the first generation learners as the school is only a part of their ecosystem
- ❑ Access to education will end merely with admission; sustaining performance is a different issue altogether
- ❑ Curriculum and pedagogy need to be revamped to respond to the new diversity in the classroom.

To understand and react to the concerns on page 1, we need to view the RTE from three perspectives.

Financial impact of 25 per cent reservation in private schools

Government spending is about Rs 1,000 a child per month in a state-run school. Education in average private schools is pricier, varying from Rs 2,000 to Rs 20,000 per month. The government will reimburse private schools for admitting poor students but only to the extent of the expenditure incurred in a state-run school. The gap would have to be filled by the school.

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WHAT'S IN IT

Celebrating Diversity

With increasing mobility worldwide, classrooms are becoming diverse. Among other do's, teachers need to embrace and welcome diversity into their classrooms. Student populations often reflect the spectrum of culture, language, and religion found in the country. While social differences among students can occasionally create challenges in the classroom, they should be viewed as opportunities to broaden the horizons of students and encourage them to create positive relationships.

Research studies have shown that children are prone to forming biases on the premise of such differences as race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, or appearance. Schools must play an active role in reducing prejudice or children will continue to develop negative thoughts, which will lead to dogmatism later in their lives.

Teachers can replace these biases with appreciation and a tolerance for cultural and economic differences. They can instil in children an understanding of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and respect for group differences. This will also be a model of acceptance to colleagues and parents. "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept, and celebrate those differences." —Audre Lorde

Bringing Diversity into Your Classroom

To bring a rich cultural flavour into your classroom, along with real objects and experiences, you may consider the following enhancements to your classroom:

Classroom Aesthetics

- ❑ Posters that are representative of various cultures, brochures, and photographs of people and places
- ❑ Textile samples from around the world
- ❑ Art forms from other places, including pottery, paintings, baskets, etc.

Articles for Display

- ❑ Tea cups, chopsticks, fans, shoes, and clothing
- ❑ Magazines and newspapers printed in different languages, as well as foreign coins
- ❑ Dolls with varying racial background
- ❑ Adaptive equipment for differently-abled people

Music and Movement

- ❑ Folk songs translated into foreign languages for children
- ❑ Instruments such as thumb pianos, bells, harmonica, etc.



A World of Difference

Working with adolescents with autism is a 'challenge' for many teachers, especially those who have not had the opportunity to understand the problem from the eyes of the child who is diagnosed with it. When we develop the 'difficult-to-handle' attitude, it limits our understanding of the problem. This makes us miss the obvious needs of the individual with autism and leads to many 'problem behaviours' (stress behaviours) and 'learning problems' the child develops over a period of time. A child with autism has differences. These differences, with a little bit of understanding, and a clear, structured plan from the teacher can make a world of a difference to the child for whom we can be a key to opening up the whole world of learning.

Understanding the Special Needs of an Individual with Autism

Differences in Communication

Imagine that you are stuck in a tourist destination without any knowledge of the local language or customs. This is how many individuals with autism feel every moment of their lives within the seemingly 'secure' surroundings of their own homes or school. As a teacher, one needs to start listening to unspoken words, observe gestures carefully, and understand the unexpressed needs and emotions of individuals with autism. We need to learn from such students, who have a totally different language and set of rules and gestures for communication. We need to understand what these words, gestures, needs, and emotions mean. Once we begin to understand the behaviours that make them 'different' from us, it will be easier to communicate with them and also get them to understand what we expect from them. This will gradually facilitate the learning process and lead to a two-way communication.

Differences in Thought

Several 'distortions' in thinking contribute to the differences and the stress behaviours in individuals with autism. Many individuals with autism have problems in planning, monitoring, and directing their own activities. In short, many individuals with autism do not use 'insights' from previous learning experiences while learning a new task. They see every experience as we would perhaps see an ancient text (without meaning) and therefore, they look at a process and every experience only as a set of details. They try to make a learning experience meaningful and exert control over new or stressful situations through the use of such details. If the details are altered in any way, a previously learnt behaviour cannot take place as it becomes totally new information to process.

Differences in the Sensory System

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is often mentioned as a major hurdle in the learning process of many individuals with autism. SPD interferes with learning and creates stress behaviours. Our senses are channels for input of information that will facilitate learning. If they are unable to carry the correct information because they are hypo- or hypersensitive, then the learning process will be greatly affected.

Differences in Learning, Memory and Attention

Individuals with autism take in information with little analysis or integration. They observe many details and do not put them together. Individuals with autism may repeat the same mistakes as they have difficulty learning from experience. Though they may do extremely complex tasks, their problem-solving skills also involve details and not meanings, experiences or insight. Coming to memory, individuals with autism have excellent rote memory, long term memory and eidetic memory. But they cannot attach any meaning to the information that they have memorised.

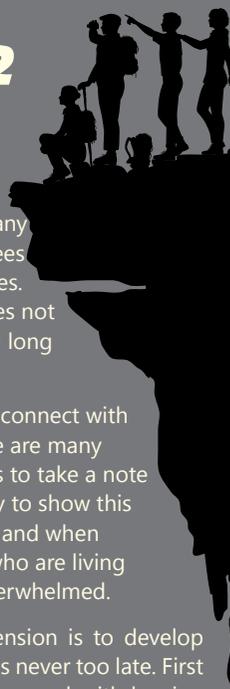
Individuals with autism can attend to stimuli but often cannot control their attention. It is usually difficult for them to activate, sustain or shift their attention. In reality, many children may want to actually complete a task or learn a new activity but since they have very limited control over their attention, they are usually either 'distracted', or are fascinated by something else that may seem trivial to us but may be very significant to them.

We need to recognise and understand the special needs of the individual with autism and consciously adapt the methods of teaching, environment, instructions and the goals that suit such individuals with the support and guidance of therapists and special educators.

— Aarti C Rajaratnam



Living on the Edge



Sharp teachers do notice that some students float along in their classes as if they were mere spectators. They do not involve themselves deeply in anything that is happening around them; they seem as if the goings on in the class do not impact them in any way. They are there because their parents have paid the school fees and staying away from school was never an option in their families. These students appear to be living on the edge. This attitude does not develop overnight. The process of withdrawal might have started long before it became noticeable.

What makes some students withdraw into a shell? They feel a disconnect with what's going on in the lives of the other students. Although there are many reasons why a student feels this way, the reason for a teacher has to take a note of is the student's lack of comprehension. He or she might be shy to show this openly or seek help. When the pressure of examinations mounts and when they hear other students talk about their future plans, students who are living on the edge of their surroundings, might become completely overwhelmed.

How can he/she help himself? One way to improve comprehension is to develop analytical thinking. One cannot develop this skill overnight but it is never too late. First and foremost, someone should talk to the student that worrying and withdrawing won't help. Either the teacher or the parent should reassure the student that nothing is impossible and explain what analytical thinking is all about.

Analytical thinking gives one the ability to solve problems quickly and effectively. If the student is taught the step-by-step approach to thinking, it will help him/her to break down complex problems into single and small components.

Let's look at how this can be done. Imagine every subject teacher decides to give home assignments on Thursday. The day of submission of these assignments is Monday. The student has two options: (a) panic and withdraw or (b) calmly think about the number of hours required for each assignment and plan how many he/she can complete. It is important to remember that everyone has the same number of hours to complete the work. Once the student actually writes down the tasks against the number of hours, grade them according to the level of difficulty and time required, he/she would feel better knowing that when broken down, the volume of work is not as threatening as it appeared at the start.

The same rule applies to concept understanding, too. Analytical thinking requires relevant information so that one can identify key issues related to this information. Collect data, compare it with another set of data and then draw conclusions.

We can break the whole process down into steps:

1. Gathering Information: These days it is easy to gather information on any given topic. You have to just type in the key words and google throws open a floodgate of information. First collect whatever information you need on the topic. An easy way to gather information is to ask questions such as "what do I want to know?" "What is the solution that I am looking for?"
2. Once you have the information, write them in two categories: causes and effects. For example, you are asked a question: Why do helium balloons fly up? Effect= balloons fly. Cause: What is the balloon filled with? Can that be the reason? If they were filled with something else, would they still fly? No. Why? Does it have anything to do with the air inside it? How is it different from the air outside it? Calm analysis of this kind helps a student understand concepts instead of merely learning words by heart.
3. Draw conclusions: Once a student learns to collect data and analyse it, drawing a conclusion becomes logical and natural.

A student who has learnt to think analytically has no fear of any new concept because he/she would know how to break chunks of information into small bits and then draw conclusions. He/she would have no need for living on the edge any more.

How Right is RTE? (Cont. from Page 1)

In average schools, 44–48 per cent of the revenue goes out as teachers' salary. If they were to follow the RTE norms on teacher qualification and salary, at a PTR of 40:1, schools would need to increase their average fees by 145 per cent to implement the RTE. This would cause great resentment among the paying parents — it shifts the responsibility of providing equitable education from the state to the individual.

Social disparity in the classroom

A common concern of teachers and parents of students in private schools is that children from disadvantaged sections of society would tend to feel out of place in elite schools. Exposing them to all the 'haves' will lead to more misery for them. Psychological slights arising out of not having pizza or cake in the tiffin box, or coming to school in a rickshaw and not a car may lead to increased tensions in the classroom and create stress for overworked teachers.

Academic inequality in the classroom

New learners would be coming from an ecosystem which would provide little support to handle the demands of private schools in terms of academic pressure, projects, field trips, etc.

Teaching without learning would be meaningless. Exclusionary educational practices will do more harm by bringing down motivation levels of disadvantaged students. Differentiated teaching with the present day PTR of 40:1 is difficult, to say the least. That said, homogenised education cannot be meaningful.

While private schools aim to achieve learning outcomes in students, it would be worthwhile to have introduction of remedial classes and bilingual support to these first generation learners. Merely giving access to students without support to reach their goals would be extremely unjust to the community and the country at large. Collecting funds for the 'poor' is one thing, sharing a textbook with them is another. Social integration should be a cornerstone of any education system and good schooling is that which allows rich and poor children to share a classroom bench while accepting and appreciating their differences. Such experiences will enrich both learners by giving a broader perspective on life.

Education is a common platform that should be available to every child—it leads to freedom from a life of missed opportunities. There is great merit in RTE to create a more inclusive educational climate in our country, provided its implementation is honest.

Being there...

“Running successfully in more than 500 schools.”



School Enrichment Program

Indian schools today strive towards an education model that is both scholastic and co-scholastic in nature. Macmillan Education, a forerunner in bringing to educationists all the valuable support to ensure holistic education, launches **School Enrichment Program** in more than **500 Schools** in the country.

Macmillan aims at empowering educators in their pursuit of providing meaningful learning experiences for all students through various levels of engagement in order to develop talent in them through a range of enjoyable and constructive classroom experiences.



To know more on Macmillan School Enrichment Program and how we can work with your school, Please write to us on school.marketing@macmillan.co.in

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Macmillan Principal Symposium at Imphal, Patiala

Bringing together
Teachers and Students
to talk on Life Skills



Macmillan Peer Educator Workshop, Daly College, Indore

Celebrate Diversity, Inculcate Respect for Differences

January

- 12 – National Youth Day
- 15 – Army Day
- 26 – Republic Day
- 30 – Martyrs' Day

February

- 28 – National Science Day

March

- 8 – International Women's Day
- 15 – World Disabled Day
- 21 – World Forestry Day
- 21 – International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

April

- 7 – World Health Day
- 18 – World Heritage Day
- 22 – Earth Day

May

- 1 – International Labour Day
- (2 – Sunday) Mother's Day
- 11 – National Technology Day
- 15 – International Day of the Family

June

- 4 – International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression
- 5 – World Environment Day
- (2 – Sunday) Fathers' Day
- 26 – International Day against Drug Abuse & Illicit Trafficking

July

- 11 – World Population Day

August

- 3 – International Friendship Day
- 15 – Independence Day
- 29 – National Sports Day

September

- 5 – Teachers' Day
- 8 – World Literacy Day
- 16 – World Ozone Day
- 26 – Day of the Deaf

October

- 1 – International Day of the Elderly
- 3 – World Habitat Day
- 4 – World Animal Welfare Day
- 16 – World Food Day

November

- 14 – Children's Day

December

- 1 – World AIDS Day
- 7 – Armed Forces Flag Day
- 10 – Human Rights Day

Disclaimer:

This is just about the funny side of teaching —it means no offence to anyone nor does it draw on any particular teacher.

Eavesdropped

Ms Pyare Mohan looked ill at ease sitting in the audience. The Principal had organised a lecture by a career-counseling expert for the Class XII students. His outrageous suggestions were shocking to Ms Pyare Mohan's sense of right and wrong. What does he mean by asking them to think out of the box? As it is, she has been having a tough time her students to think inside the box, well, at least till the examinations were out of the way. Their parents depend on her to get them to good colleges. Now, this to combat with!

Her obvious discomfort amused Fair and Menacing, or FM, as she was popularly known as. She commented loud enough for her neighbours to hear. "What a pity PM can't convince the whole bunch of them to mindlessly learn everything she dictates by heart and get into engineering colleges!"

The principal turned and gave FM a look but FM was least bothered. The principal deserved it for bringing this out-of-the-box guy and subjecting them to an hour of how they should follow their dreams. If she had followed her dreams, she would be in Bollywood now. What stopped her, of course, was her girth which measured the same as the length of her legs.

The next morning PM walked into her class and asked her students if they had revised the concept she had taught on Friday. FM was walking down the corridor and stopped to hear the student response. "No, ma'am. We couldn't do it. We were rather busy ma'am."

'Busy? What kept you busy? What can be more important than preparing for your exams now?'

"We were following our dreams, ma'am. You know very well that we can't dream unless we sleep. So, we went to sleep, ma'am."

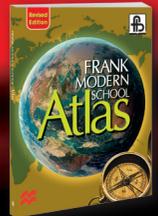
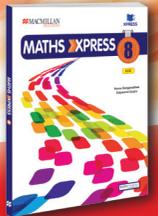
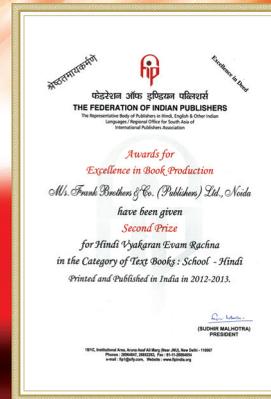
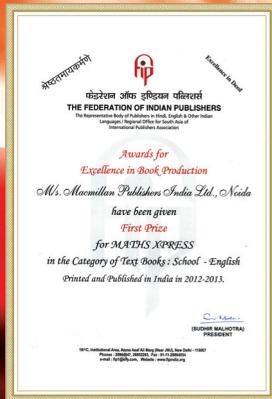
In minutes, before the class was over, everyone in the staff room knew the effect of career counselling. No one was happier than FM. Little did she know that PM knew exactly how to turn her students around before the week ran out.

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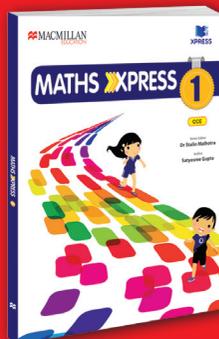
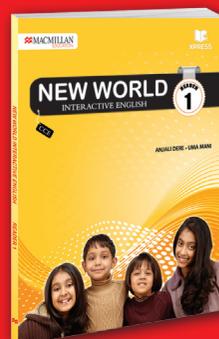
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