

# Curricular reform in schools: the importance of

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Curricular reform in schools: the importance of evaluation Evaluation plays a pivotal role in deciding what the learners learn and what the teachers teach in schools. The paper reports a study of English-language teaching conducted in Delhi State of India that sought to examine the assumption that a change in an evaluation pattern can trigger curricular reform. Did concomitant changes take place in the teaching and testing of English at the upper-primary stage when the Central Board of Secondary Education introduced changes in the courses of study and the examinations in English language at the end of class X (age 15 + ), the occasion of the first high-stakes public examination in India? This expectation of change was confirmed in the findings of this study, which may apply to other curricular areas and speak to any school system ready to implement reforms in their instructional practices. Evaluation is universally accepted as an integral part of teaching and learning. It is one of the basic components of any curriculum and plays a pivotal role in determining what learners learn. Candlin and Edelhoff (1982: vi) assert that 'learners learn most when they are quite precisely aware of . . . how their efforts are to be judged and evaluated'. Evaluation also plays a central role in deciding what teachers teach and how they teach; Reardon et al. (1994), for example, contend that 'changes in assessment policies can be used as a powerful lever for reforming schools'. This assumption provides the focus for this paper. The study reported here examines the role of evaluation in effecting curricular reform in schools, with particular reference to the English-language curriculum in India. Evaluation is widely acknowledged as a powerful means of improving the quality of education. Examinations influence the quality of teaching and learning in

schools. Whereas plans for curriculum change, according to Barnes et al. (2000), often fail to do more than generate new policy documents or exchange one form of professional rhetoric for another– without any substantive curriculum change in instructional practices, assessment does drive instruction: goals, teaching strategies, and even the tasks employed for developing various skills are derived from the anticipated evaluation. Mamta Agrawal, professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Extension in the National Council of Educational Research and Training, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi— 110016, India (e-mail: mamta48@yahoo. com), has research interests in educational evaluation, English-language testing, and teacher education. Her publications include the Handbook of Evaluation in English (New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1988) and several books on communicative tests of reading and writing, reading comprehension exercises and oral exercises in English for the use of English-language teachers at the school level. Journal of Curriculum Studies ISSN 0022—0272 print/ISSN 1366—5839 online © 2004 Taylor & Francis Ltd <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals> DOI: 10. 1080/0022027032000152987 362 M. AGRAWAL Several researchers (Broadfoot et al. 1990, Stake et al. 1991, Gifford and O'Connor 1992) have drawn the attention of educational planners and administrators to the possibility of using changes in evaluation practices to reform the curriculum. In their review of secondary examinations, Eckstein and Noah (1993: 9) suggest that educational reform is the main reason why examinations have ‘ done more than persist’ in recent times and ‘ have positively flourished’. The idea of using examinations and assessment for curricular reform, as Torrance (1995) notes, is perhaps

most developed in the USA and the UK where professional debates about the merits of measurement-driven instruction have helped to put the relationship of assessment to curriculum change and school reform on the top of the educational policy agenda. The issue is of immediate importance because evaluation is being employed in many countries in the belief that it will be a catalyst for curriculum change (Barnes et al. 2000). The backwash effect of such evaluation policies and practices on instructional practices in schools needs to be explored. Broadly speaking, the proponents of evaluation reform think that such written tasks as multiple-choice tests have a restricting effect on the curriculum and teaching methods. This kind of evaluation encourages teachers to teach students test-taking skills rather than develop metacognitive skills and understandings. However, on the other hand, when the content and the range of skills and competencies covered by examination are widened, teachers will be required to make corresponding changes in their approaches. In this paper, I explore how far a ' high-stakes' public examination influences both classroom teaching and testing at a particular school stage in India. I analyse the documentation of the curriculum expectations and evaluation design of a high-stakes examination, and examine how teachers respond to these changes by adjusting their teaching strategies and evaluation tasks. A mandated assessment at the first public examination shapes Indian teachers' beliefs about what is important, and this assessment has a more direct bearing on the implemented curriculum than any documentation alone. I use a teacher questionnaire to examine what teachers do in the classroom. I also examine question/test papers prepared by teachers to secure information about their evaluation

practices. Context of evaluation and curricular reform in English-language teaching In the past two decades, second-language teaching has changed fundamentally in response to the perception that language is a tool to be used in a purposeful manner. A new approach to such teaching focuses on enabling pupils to communicate confidently and naturally in the target language. In other words, to communicate effectively in real life, students need more than mere knowledge about the language; in addition they must be able to use the language effectively with confidence and fluency. Almost 40 years ago Newmark (1979) defined as 'structurally incompetent' the student who has developed the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences yet is CURRICULAR REFORM 363 unable to perform simple communicative tasks. Thus the overriding goal of the contemporary trend in English-language teaching is to develop the practical language skills needed for such different purposes as social interactions, academic studies, and subsequent adult life. 'English' is changing from the traditional structure-based curriculum to an activitybased curriculum that promotes fluency, appropriateness and accuracy in the use of the language, and develops students' skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a result, rather than offering traditional textbook-based questions, evaluation instruments now emphasize reading and writing tasks that draw from authentic situations and texts. Reading (and tested) texts include extracts from newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, reports, information brochures, leaflets, stories, poems, articles, and biographies. Tables, diagrams and other visual materials are also included in evaluation methods. Writing tasks have changed from traditional essays or paragraphs to letters, notices, and

reports, and note-making, as required in real-life situations. The education system in India Each state in India develops its own curriculum for different school stages (with students beginning at age 5). The primary stage (classes I to V) and the upper-primary stage (classes VI to VIII) are the responsibility of the state departments of education. The secondary stage (classes IX and X) and the higher-secondary stage (classes XI and XII) are governed by state boards of education which are responsible for both prescribing the syllabi and administering public examinations at the end of classes X (age 15 + ) and XII (which mark the end of secondary school and higher secondary respectively). The examination at the end of class X is the first examination that is ‘ high-stakes’, because it signifies the completion of secondary school and is used as the main criterion for determining admission to the higher secondary level: [T]he class X public examination is held in such an awe by the public that its pattern percolates down to even the initial stages of schooling. As a result, even small children are prepared along the lines of board examinations right from the beginning. (National Council of Educational Research and Training 2000: 98) The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is one such board, operating in Delhi State and in many other parts of India. All secondary schools in Delhi (and some schools in all states) are affiliated to CBSE. Beginning in 1993 –1994 CBSE initiated a change in the English ‘ A’1 course curriculum for classes IX and X, and the first class X public examination with the changed English-language curriculum was held in 1995. The emphasis in this new curriculum shifted ‘ from teaching to learning, with the focus on equipping the learner with essential language skills and granting him confidence to use them effectively

in life situation'. This necessitated a change in testing. The shift was 'consequently from content testing to skill testing' (CBSE 1993c: Foreword).

364 M. AGRAWAL It is against this backdrop of a reform agenda in English-language curriculum introduced by CBSE in classes IX and X that I examine the changes in teaching and testing taking place in English at the upper-primary stage (classes VI, VII, and VIII). Specific features of CBSE's English course 'Interact in English' (1993a), the CBSE course in English, is based on the communicative approach to teaching a second language and emphasizes students' communicative competence. The course prepares students for real-life situations in which they may be required to use English. The selection of the course content has been determined in the light of students' present and future academic, social, and professional needs. The overall aims of 'Interact in English' (CBSE 1993c: 1) are: to enable the learner to communicate effectively and appropriately in real-life situations; to use English effectively across the curriculum; to develop and integrate the use of the four language skills, i. e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing; to develop an interest in and appreciation of literature; and to recycle and reinforce structures already learned. Because this new curriculum emphasizes the communicative use of English, the associated evaluation procedures have also changed. CBSE uses a multi-component evaluation instrument intended to capture the major features of students' communicative competence. It no longer tests students' knowledge of the content of a text but focuses on evaluating their ability to use English effectively as a means of communication. Consequently, the question paper in English (CBSE 1993c: 6 —7) consists of the following: Reading: Three

unseen passages, factual, discursive, and literary, with a variety of comprehension questions. Writing: involving a variety of writing tasks: writing a note, notice, message, telegram, or short postcard; writing a short essay based on verbal stimulus such as an advertisement, notice, newspaper cutting, table, diary extract, notes, letter, or other form of correspondence; writing a short essay with guidance; writing an essay based on visual stimulus such as diagram, picture, graphs, map, cartoon, or flow chart. Grammar: a variety of short questions involving the use of particular structures within a context. Text types include, for example, CURRICULAR REFORM 365 cloze, gap-filling, sentence-completion, sentence-reordering, editing, dialogue-completion, and sentence transformation. Literature: The questions on literary text testing comprehension at different levels: literal, inferential, and evaluative. Examination papers at both the class IX and X level are structured in this way. However, in class IX the schools are responsible for carrying out the final written tests, and the oral skills of listening and speaking are also evaluated through school-based continuous evaluation by the teacher. In class X the evaluation is carried out by CBSE under formal external examination conditions. 'Interact in English' embodies a three-way link between the objectives of the course, transactional strategies, and evaluation of performance. The transactional strategies ensure that the course objectives are achieved. Thus in the traditional English-language classroom, the common procedure is whole-class work in which the students face the teacher and the teacher talks to the class as a whole. In the new approach the students are also asked to work individually, in pairs, or in groups. The teacher organizes the activities and acts as a



monitor and facilitator. In pairs and groups the students are encouraged to communicate with each other, and complete the task at hand jointly. However, in many activities the teacher may also perform the role of language instructor presenting the new vocabulary and structure. The assessment tasks, in turn, are closely linked to the competence developed through classroom curriculum transaction. The influence of the public examination This study sought to explore the influence of the changed ‘ high-stakes’ public examination in English at class X level on the English curriculum at upper-primary level. The questions that the study addressed are: What is the backwash effect of CBSE’s examination in English on the teaching of English at upper-primary level? How have teachers changed the evaluation pattern in English in upper-primary classes as a consequence of the new CBSE Englishlanguage examination? Sample In that my goal was to explore the influence of the class X public examination in English on the upper-primary stage curriculum, the sample was drawn from schools that offered the English ‘ A’ course in class X. In Delhi there are four types of schools at the secondary level: government schools, government-aided schools, Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central schools), and private schools. 2 The government and the government-aided schools, run by the state government of Delhi, use Hindi as medium of instruction and teach English as a subject. 3 Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central schools) are schools run by the central government all over India. They teach English as 366 M. AGRAWAL Table 1. Study sample. Teachers’ age N of schools N of teachers Teachers trained in CELT Teachers untrained in CELT 25 — 45 > 45 Kendriya Vidyalayas Govt. schools Govt.-aided schools Private schools 2 3 1 2 10 13 3

8 6 7 1 5 4 6 2 3 4 5 2 7 6 8 1 1 Total 8 34 19 15 18 16 Type of school a subject and also use it as medium of instruction for teaching science and mathematics. In the private schools, run totally by private agencies, English is the first language. They teach it as a subject and also use it as medium of instruction for all other subjects. The sample was drawn in such a way that all school categories were included, and each selected school was typical of its category. Although efforts were made to include two or three schools of each category, some schools did not respond to the repeated requests to participate. The resulting sample included 34 teachers from eight schools (see table 1). It included teachers with a wide variety of experience, including some who had been teaching for many years and others who had only a few years of experience. Out of 34 teachers only two were male. Except for four teachers, all had preservice teacher training leading to a baccalaureate in education. However, only 19 of the teachers had attended Communicative English-language Teaching (CELT) Orientation courses (ranging from 3 to 20 days). These courses are significant because they help teachers understand the new approach to teaching of English. Data collection I draw on two primary sources of data: a teacher questionnaire developed for the study and the annual examination question papers for classes VI, VII and VIII. The questionnaire sought to investigate teaching and evaluation practices in English at the upper-primary level. In particular, it asked teachers to comment on their teaching practices vis-à-vis the class X examination and on the importance of developing communication skills. The analysis of the English-language question papers for the final examination in classes VI, VII and VIII had two purposes: first, to document

the extent to which school-based examinations mirrored CBSE's papers<sup>4</sup> in terms of sections, weights given different components, types of reading passages, writing tasks, etc.; and, second, to analyse classroom teaching practices, given that a question paper reflects what is being taught in the class and how it is taught. CURRICULAR REFORM 367 Informal interviews were also held with several head teachers to explore the actual status of English teaching in schools. These observations were recorded. Findings The questionnaire The sample comprised 34 teachers from eight schools in Delhi. On the question of which method of teaching English they used at the upperprimary level, all teachers reported using the communicative approach; only 25% used other methods in combination with the communicative approach. All teachers agreed they had changed their methodology in view of CBSE's new approach at the class IX and X levels, and reported that previously they were using either the structural approach<sup>5</sup> or a blend of translation method and structural approach. I asked the teachers whether their schools had changed teaching materials in response to the new approach and found that it was possible to change the textbooks only in private schools. The state-run schools used the old-style English textbooks because it was not in their power to change them. However, the teachers of Kendriya Vidyalayas and aided schools provided extra inputs by making the classroom interactive through student discussions, giving students new material from outside, and preparing their own exercises based on the new pattern. The government-school teachers, with one exception, could not provide new materials or new types of exercises. I asked the teachers to indicate the order in which they developed the various

language skills, i. e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Most preferred teaching reading and writing skills first, followed by oral skills. However, when asked how important it was to develop oral, reading, and writing skills, all teachers responded that it was extremely important to develop all of them. To develop oral skills, 60% of teachers used cassettes, 40% pair-work, 60% group-work, 55% whole-class work, and 60% role-play. To assess oral skills, 90% of teachers used continuous observation of students' participation in classroom activities. Only 10% used organized oral tests in assessing oral competence. In developing reading skills, 88% of teachers used unseen texts and comprehension questions based on those texts, 40% depended only on the textbooks, whereas 30% took the initiative of using newspapers, story books and magazines, and encouraged students to read them. When asked how they assessed reading comprehension, 88% said they used unseen passages. Twenty per cent used the material from the textbooks for testing reading comprehension. In developing writing skills, all teachers agreed that they encouraged students to write on their own. Regarding the assessment of writing skills, notice-writing, letter-writing, story-writing and paragraph-writing were the tasks used by all teachers in all classes. However, diary-writing was used 368 M. AGRAWAL only by Kendriya Vidyalaya and private school teachers, and then only in class VIII. (This task involves higher writing skills than other writing tasks.) Regarding the grammar teaching, the teachers had varied opinions. Sixty-two per cent thought it was extremely important to teach grammar, 24% considered it of some importance, and only 14% thought that teaching grammar was beneficial but not essential. Although 95% agreed they taught grammar, only 60% said they taught

formal grammar. The remainder taught grammar functionally, without telling students the formal rules. However, all teachers gave practice grammar exercises in class. Grammar was assessed by means of multiple-choice questions, fill in the blanks, and transformation questions. Sixty-five per cent of teachers emulated CBSE's question papers for assessing grammar in the school tests. All teachers said they had changed their question papers in English according to CBSE's pattern, which meant that the papers now had four sections, 'reading', 'writing', 'grammar', and 'literature', and the tasks were skill-based. Ninety per cent of teachers said their papers were based on CBSE's pattern 'to a large extent'. Only 10% prepared their question papers with variations from CBSE's pattern. On the question of what prompted them to change their teaching and evaluation at the upper-primary level, the reply of a teacher from an aided school echoed the sentiments of others. Her school offered an 'A' course in classes IX and X. So it was a collective decision to change over to the new approach with the dual purpose of preparing students well in advance of the class X CBSE examination and also developing their communicative skills. To sum up, the questionnaire results indicated that the teachers were constantly aware of CBSE's new scheme of English teaching at classes IX and X and the changed external examination, and in view of that they had changed their teaching, their support material, and their evaluation patterns. Interviews Informal discussions were held with head teachers with a background in English-language teaching in the sample schools. The purpose of the discussions was to investigate the actual teaching of English in the classroom. The discussions revealed substantially common practices in the teaching of the different language skills. Reading

and writing were emphasized in the upper-primary classes, principally because these are the skills tested by the class X CBSE examination. In the evaluation scheme circulated by CBSE (1993b, 6 —11), the skills of listening and speaking were to be evaluated by teachers at the school level through continuous evaluation only at the class IX level. As these skills were not evaluated at the class X level, they were not pursued as vigorously as the other skills. The heads were of the view that if CBSE made it obligatory for the schools to evaluate oral skills at the class X level and submit the internal assessment grades to CBSE to be shown on the CURRICULAR REFORM 369 official marksheet, perhaps the teaching of oral skills in schools would be strengthened, not only at the secondary level but also at lower levels. When describing the actual situation in schools, the heads said that although teachers might talk about group-work, pair-work, role-play, etc., for creating situations for interaction among students, these activities occurred only occasionally in the classroom. Teachers preferred to tread safer ground by teaching reading and writing in that these were the skills evaluated in CBSE's examination. All the heads agreed that the teachers made extra efforts to develop students' reading and writing skills through the communicative approach by using extra support materials; preparing new kind of exercises; using newspapers, magazines and story books for reading; using unseen passages for reading comprehension; and giving guided composition of different varieties for developing writing skills, etc. – all of which had rarely occurred previously. On the teaching of grammar, the heads of a Kendriya Vidyalaya and a government school confirmed that grammar was taught formally in their schools as it was mandated in their old textbooks for upper-

primary classes. They made a case for teaching grammar at this level by saying that the upper-primary stage was meant as a preparatory stage for the secondary level. The teaching of formal grammar familiarized the students with the elements of language that helped them to manipulate English-language structure and use language functionally when they reached classes IX and X. On the question of how the teachers coped with the new approach, the head teachers confirmed that the private schools had changed their textbooks for the upper-primary classes as soon as the new CBSE pattern was introduced at the secondary level. With the new materials in hand, and with the support of orientation courses organized by these schools for their teachers, the private school teachers had an easier transition to the new approach than their counterparts in the state-run schools. Without the new kind of materials, the teachers in government schools found it difficult to adopt the new approach immediately. However, with the various orientation courses in communicative English-language teaching organized by different agencies, the teachers in these schools also acquired the necessary understanding, and had introduced changes in their teaching and testing practices. When asked how teachers who had not undergone any orientation in communicative English-language teaching carried on with their teaching and testing, the heads replied that teachers were coming to grips with the system, and as they interacted with the other teachers they had learned the basics of the new approach. In due course those teachers would attend courses. Tests The analysis of 18 tests<sup>6</sup> revealed some interesting facts. All the schools that had adopted English 'A' course at the secondary stage had changed the pattern of their tests along the lines of CBSE's paper

at the upper-primary level. Before the new CBSE pattern of examination was introduced, tests in 370 M. AGRAWAL English were traditional in nature, making use of mainly textbook-based questions on prose, poetry, and supplementary readers, together with grammar questions and a composition. The reading comprehension passage consisted of a short story or a factual paragraph with open-ended questions, which could be answered by lifting sentences from the given paragraph. These papers also were prepared along the lines of the class X CBSE English paper with its two sections: grammar and composition; and detailed text (prose, poetry) and non-detailed text. 7 Now, after the introduction of the new approach and new evaluation pattern, English question papers have four sections; reading, writing, grammar, and literature, as in CBSE's question paper. Reading The 18 test papers from class VI to class VIII contained two or three unseen reading passages, together with questions of different varieties, i. e. openended questions, gap-filling, completion, table-completion, objective questions including matching type, and true/false and multiple choice. Most of the passages also have two to four items designed to test the word-attack skill: students have to deduce the meaning of a word from its context. The passages used in the tests were of different varieties – factual, literary, and discursive. In two tests in each class, poems were also used as literary passages. Discursive passages figured more prominently in class VIII tests than in those of classes VI and VII. The objectives of reading covered through most of the tests were identifying the main points of a text, deducing the meaning of a word from the context, locating information, and interpreting and inferring ideas in a text. Here is an example from the reading section of



a class VIII question paper: Read this passage and answer the questions that follow: Sacked South African Cricket Captain Hansie Cronje has reportedly gone into seclusion with a ring of security guards to keep reporters away, three weeks after the match-fixing scandal involving him broke out. Cronje, when contacted at his luxury house in Francourt town of Western Cape province by Johannesburg's weekly 'The Mail' refused to make any comment till the judicial inquiry into the controversy was over. (1) Complete the statements: (a) Tight security has been provide to Cronje in order to \_\_\_\_\_. (b) At the moment, Cronje has been staying at \_\_\_\_\_. (c) Cronje did not want to talk to 'The Mail' until \_\_\_\_\_. (2) Find words from the passage which mean: (a) away from others. (b) comfortable and expensive. The reading task given in this school's test replicated the types of task in the CBSE paper. This is evident from the following reading tasks which appeared in one of the CBSE (2000: 3 — 9) papers: CURRICULAR REFORM 371 Read the passage and answer the questions given after it. During the Gulf war a few years back tens of thousands of sea birds were killed due to oil spills. Do you know what makes crude oil on ocean water so deadly? Crude oil is not used in the same state it is produced at the off-shore wells. It is converted in refineries into a wide range of products such as gasoline, kerosene, diesel, fuel oils and petrochemical feed stocks. Before it is refined the oil contains potentially fatal components. Complete the statements given below: (a) The death of sea birds was caused by \_\_\_\_\_. (b) Potentially fatal compounds are found in the oil before \_\_\_\_\_. (c) Two useful products we get from the crude oil are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The following reading task from the same CBSE question paper illustrates the word-attack skill: Read the passage given below and

answer the questions that follow. The small thieves admired my ingenuity. ‘Auntie, you are really great’. They ran around everywhere in excitement. They screamed and yelled. In the midst of the commotion, the children’s father suddenly appeared out of nowhere and caught us unawares. The small thieves fled, leaving me, the gang chief neatly cornered. Pick out one word each from the passage which means the following: (a) Clever at making anything happen \_\_\_\_\_. (b) Noisy disturbance \_\_\_\_\_.

8 The weight allotted to the reading section ranged from 15% to 30% in the 18 tests analysed from different schools. The number of tests using the particular text-types and item-types is summarized in table 2. Writing The weight allotted to the writing section varied from 15% to 30% in different tests. The analysis indicates that the number of writing tasks ranged from two to four in the 18 question papers studied. In classes VI and VII, two to three tasks were more common, whereas in class VIII, three to four tasks were given. In the higher classes, the question papers more closely emulated the CBSE papers. The analysis of the six tests for each class is presented in table 3. Letter-writing was the most common task in all tests. Other tasks with high frequency were notice-writing and guided composition. Visual stimulus was used for writing by only one school in all the three classes. In some schools traditional composition/essay writing was still prevalent. Clearly, the tasks given in these tests correspond to the types of tasks given in CBSE’s paper, except the unguided composition. Here is an example of a writing task from a question paper for class VIII:

| Item types         | VI | VII | VIII |
|--------------------|----|-----|------|
| Text types         | 2  | 3   | 3    |
| Factual            | 3  | 3   | 3    |
| Literary           | 3  | 3   | 3    |
| Discursive         | 3  | 3   | 3    |
| Gapfilling         | 1  | 3   | 3    |
| Sentencecompletion | 3  | 3   | 3    |
| Tablefilling       | 3  | 3   | 3    |
| Openended          | 3  | 3   | 3    |
| Pickingout         | 3  | 3   | 3    |

Objectivetype 3 Class 4 3 3 2 2 — 6 6 5 5 4 5 1 2 1 2 Table 3. Writing.

Number of tasks Items 2 3 4 Notice Letter Guided composition Unguided

composition Visual stimulus Diarywriting Message/ notice Article VI VII VIII 3

4 1 2 1 3 1 1 2 2 1 3 6 6 6 4 1 4 2 4 1 1 1 1 — 1 — 1 — 3 — — 1 M. AGRAWAL

Class CURRICULAR REFORM 373 You are the cultural secretary of your

school. You have been asked to inform the students of class VII and VIII

about an inter-school debate. Write a notice for the notice board in not more than 50 words inviting the names of the students who would like to

participate in the debate. (5 marks) This task can be compared with the

similar question given in a CBSE (1999: 10) paper: The school has decided to

hold a fete in the school playground. The principal has asked you to write, as

the Headboy/Headgirl of the school, a notice about this fete, inviting the

students and the teachers to participate in it. The notice should include all

necessary details. In the space below write out the notice in not more than

50 words. (5 marks) Similarly, other writing tasks in the test also correspond

to a large extent to the tasks given in the CBSE papers. Though it is not

known whether the writing tasks given in the school examination papers

were already rehearsed in class, most of the tasks seemed to be unseen and

therefore tested students' writing skills. Grammar The weighting assigned to

grammar ranged from 15% to 30% in the 18 question papers analysed. The

analysis of tests is presented in table 4. In the testing of grammar the tests

did not seem to adhere to the CBSE pattern. In fact only two schools seemed

to follow CBSE's question paper to a large extent by offering such tasks as

error-recognition, omissions in a paragraph (editing), rearrangement of

jumbled words into a meaningful sentence, etc. Many papers were still using

traditional grammar items like adding prefixes and suffixes, converting verbs into nouns, and transforming of sentences by the way of changing voice and narration, etc. Punctuation items were also used in three tests as isolated items. Gap-filling items were all isolated items on filling in the appropriate verbs, prepositions, articles, or determiners. The examples of traditional grammar used by schools for evaluating students' competency in grammar are as follows: (1) Underline the correct prepositions in the following sentences: (a) He lives (on, in, at) Malaysia. (b) He sat (among, between) the two trees. (c) This book is quite different (by, with, from) that book. (2) Do as directed: (a) She said, ' I have just written a letter to my mother'. (Re-write in indirect speech.) (b) The police are watching the crowd. (Begin with ' The crowd \_\_\_\_\_'.) [Students are expected to write the sentence in the passive voice.] The questions that emulate the CBSE paper are as follows: (1) Rearrange the following jumbled up words so as to make meaningful sentences to complete the dialogue that follows. (3 marks) 374 Table 4.

Grammar Item types Errorrecognition Omission in a paragraph Rearrange jumbled words Punctuation Gapfilling Transformation of sentences Wordmaking 1 1 2 1 1 2 2 2 2 1 — 2 3 5 3 5 6 6 2 2 3 N of items Class 3 4 5 VI VII VIII 3 4 3 1 1 3 2 1 M. AGRAWAL CURRICULAR REFORM 375 Priya: been/morning/where/have/you/since? Rajni: old/meet/went/friend/I/to/an Priya: you/did/nice/time/have/a/her/with? (2) There is an error in each line. Underline each error and write your correction in the space provided. She came home in six in the evening. \_\_\_\_\_ (a) She narrated a accident she saw \_\_\_\_\_ (b) in her way. Luckily there was no serious \_\_\_\_\_ (c) injury to anyone. She hasn't eat her \_\_\_\_\_ (d) dinner as she was upset. She has a \_\_\_\_\_ (e)

headache, she says. These questions can be compared to similar questions in the CBSE (2000: 19) paper from 2000. For example: (1) Rearrange the words and phrases given below to form meaningful sentences. (a) is/great/training/key to/the/performance. (b) gets/the right/performance/training/the right. (c) are some/business/paid people/best/sports/trainers/ why/of the/in the/ that is. (2) The following passage has not been edited. There is one error in each line. Underline the error and write your correction in the space provided. The first one has been done for you as an example. All life on earth can ultimately is (be) traced back on the sea. Creatures (a) \_\_\_\_\_ with limbs or fingers rather than (b) \_\_\_\_\_ fins has evolved from fishes (c) \_\_\_\_\_ 33 million years before. (d) \_\_\_\_\_ The new fossil find in a rock near (e) \_\_\_\_\_ Scotland provide one of the few clues (f) \_\_\_\_\_ to what has been happening (g) \_\_\_\_\_ on these 30 million years. (h) \_\_\_\_\_ The question papers of the Kendriya Vidyalayas, to some extent, and the private schools accurately mirrored CBSE's papers regarding grammar. The papers of the government schools and the aided schools remained traditional in their testing of grammar. Kendriya Vidyalayas used both kinds of questions in their papers. Literature The literature section aimed at testing the students' knowledge of texts. The weight given to this section ranged from 20% to 30%, which is not much different from the 25% in the CBSE papers. The summary of the analysis of 18 tests is presented in table 5. Table 5 indicates that almost all the tests made use of extracts from prose pieces and poems taken from the textbook, and posed short-answer questions based on them. The purpose of these questions was to test the local comprehension ability, and sometimes the interpretative

comprehension ability, of the students. 376 M. AGRAWAL Table 5. Literature. Question type Class Poetry extracts Prose extracts Essay-type question Short answer Very short answers VI VII VIII 6 4 4 6 3 3 1 2 2 6 6 6 2 — 1 Only two tests in each of class VII and class VIII used essay-type questions aimed at testing students' extrapolation skills; these tests were from a private school and a Kendriya Vidyalaya. The question given in the school test can be compared to an extrapolatory question given in a CBSE paper: Extrapolatory question in the school test for class VII (6 marks) Imagine you are Sindbad. Write a paragraph describing how you became rich. Extrapolatory question in CBSE's paper (8 marks) Write a page of the diary of the Princess expressing her feelings on the evening prior to the trial of the young man. (CBSE 1999: 24) The most common type of question used for testing literature required short answers, about 15 to 30 words, and were generally simple, factual whquestions<sup>9</sup> mainly testing recall of information, although sometimes inferential and interpretative questions of the kind found on the CBSE papers did appear. The tests adhered to the CBSE pattern as far as the poetry and prose extracts were concerned: they were based on an extract from a poem or from a prose text from the prescribed reader. The extract is followed by two or three questions to test local comprehension of the set text. The school tests followed the same pattern as that of CBSE in such questions.

Conclusion The study clearly indicates that CBSE's class X examination was the goal that teachers kept in sight from early in a student's schooling. The upperprimary stage was considered as a preparation for the ensuing CBSE examination. The teacher questionnaire results, the interviews with the heads, and the analysis of the tests clearly indicate the teachers' constant

awareness of the external examination. Other studies support this finding. Stephens et al. (1994) and Clarke and Stephens (1996), in a study of the influence of ' high-stakes' examinations on mathematics teaching in Victoria, Australia, describe the CURRICULAR REFORM 377 relationship between mandated assessment and instruction as ' the ripple effect'. The image is one of a pebble or stone dropped into a pond at one point, with ripples spreading across the entire surface of the water. In this Indian case, the stone is represented by the new class X English CBSE examination, and the ripples suggest the effect on teaching and evaluation throughout the upper-primary school. This study supports the significance of the ' ripple effect' in class VI, VII and VIII as a result of the changed evaluation pattern in class X. To some extent the findings of this study reflect the findings of the CBSE-English Language Teaching Project (CBSE-ELT) curriculum implementation study (Mathew 1997). While examining the influence of the new CBSE English curriculum on teaching and evaluation in class IX, Mathew noted a definite shift towards a communicatively oriented classroom in different types of schools in different regions of the country. She found this shift to be more significant when the teacher's focus was on teaching reading, speaking, and listening rather than on writing. She found that the influence of examination was more apparent in the literature classes. Her study of school-made tests and examination papers in class IX and X indicated that they mirrored the format of the CBSE final examination to a great extent in mark allotment, length and type of passages, item-types, and objectives covered. The prevailing assumption that a change in evaluation can leverage curricular reform is supported by this study. In a sample that included a wide

range of variety, private schools, centrally-run Kendriya Vidyalayas, state-run government schools, and aided schools, the impact of the highstakes examination on instruction and evaluation was found to be more or less uniform. In all schools, teachers considered that it was important to build into their teaching and evaluation procedures a range of practices that initiated the students into the type of skills required in the class X examination. This fact was most apparent where the teachers' concern was teaching the skills of reading and writing. The development of oral skills, though outlined by the new English curriculum, was not found to be taken up by the teachers seriously enough because these skills do not form part of the class X CBSE examination. The pattern of teaching and testing of literature was also determined by the CBSE examination. Except for the teaching and testing of grammar, which still continued on traditional lines in state-run schools, it can be safely claimed that it is the class X examination that has effected the curriculum changes in upper-primary classes. The teacher preparation programme and the introduction of new textbooks in private schools have helped in bringing about the changes, but these factors also followed the changes in class X examination. The form of evaluation in higher classes is critical in shaping the teachers' perceptions about what is important to teach and to evaluate, and the skills to be developed and encouraged. They want their students to perform successfully in the high-stakes examination. Whenever a new form of examination is introduced in class X examinations, it acts as a powerful mechanism for bringing about curriculum change in the preceding years of schools. Practices that do not contribute directly to the performance skills needed for the targeted



examination receive an indifferent treatment, as has 378 M. AGRAWAL happened in developing and evaluating oral skills in the case of the English examination. The reform in evaluation system acts as an engine for curricular reform. Notes 1. The ' A' course in English is for students who study English from class I; the ' B' course is meant for those students who start studying English from class VI. 2. In India the so-called ' public' schools are privately administered. 3. Most government schools and aided schools in Delhi offer ' B' Course in English. Only a few have recently switched over to the ' A' course. 4. Copies of question papers referred to in this article are available from Central Board of Secondary Education, 2 Community Centre, Preet Vihar, Delhi-110092, India. 5. In the structural approach to English-language teaching, the form of language is given more importance than functions. Structuralists believe that graded and repetitive sentence drills offer an excellent system of language learning (McArthur 1983: 100). Except for the CBSE English ' A' course and English courses run by three or four state boards, Englishlanguage teaching in India is still based on the structural approach. 6. I collected data from eight schools: three government schools, one aided school, two private schools, and two Kendriya Vidyalayas. One private school and one Kendriya Vidyalaya did not supply their tests. Hence, six tests for each of class VI, VII, and VIII (a total of 18) were analysed for this study. 7. A detailed text is intended for in-depth study of the thematic content and the language content. A non-detailed text (a supplementary reader) is for extensive study. The test questions asked on a non-detailed text are generally global in nature. 8. The passages given here are incomplete. Selections have been extracted to illustrate the comparison

between the school paper and CBSE's paper. 9. A 'wh-question' uses such words as 'what', 'which', 'why', 'where', 'whom', etc. Except for 'why', wh-questions are factual questions that usually test the recall of information.

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