

Mainstream and Shadow Education: Contestations in Form and Function of School

Vandana Talegaonkar

School of Liberal Studies and Education, Navrachana University, Vasna-Bhaily Road, Vadodara-391 410

Abstract

The trajectory of development of the institution of school for imparting education demands an analysis of the challenges it faces and its response to the challenges. The impact of the emergence and spread of the private coaching industry is so extensive that its existence is recognized as shadow education. Mainstream education comprises institution of school among other formal institutions of education. The response of schools to the private coaching industry demonstrates that there has been a play with form and function of schools. Currently, there is an amalgamation of the shadow education and mainstream education in the form of Concept Schools. An analysis of the responses of school- the mainstream education- to the challenge of shadow education- the private coaching industry raises a significant question on the primary function of schools and the trajectory that value education will follow.

Keywords

Form of school, function of school, mainstream education, shadow education system, exam oriented learning, value education

Introduction

The trajectory of development of the institution of school for imparting education offers an insight into the way institutions are established and the metamorphosis they undergo in the face of changing societal challenges. School is an institution which caters to the twelve years of education for children in the age group of six to eighteen years. The contemporary school and its challenges can be examined employing Sullivan's principle (1896) 'Form ever follows function' from architecture. The principle indicates that the form of an object or a building is

based on its intended function. Responding to the challenges for shape of a building of the industrial society Sullivan stated,

“Whether it is the sweeping eagle in his flight, or the open apple-blossom, the toiling work-horse, the blithe swan, the branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coursing sun, form ever follows function, and this is the law. Where function does not change, form does not change. The granite rocks, the ever-brooding hills, remain for ages; the lightning lives, comes into shape, and dies, in a twinkling.

It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.” (Sullivan, 1896)

This establishes the supremacy of function. Not restricted to the building alone, form and function principle provides an appropriate handle to grasp the metamorphosis of school and school education.

Question of Priority in Functions of School

The root of the functions of school lies in the evolution of society and its needs. As the nomadic mode of life gave way to life in settlement and as the society evolved from simple to complex, transmission and preservation of knowledge became necessary. The seeds of school were sown here. The family fulfilled this responsibility in simple society. With the society becoming complex, the inadequacy of family to fulfil this role was felt and hence separate institutions for education- schools- were established. The broader goals of education served as the framework for function of schools. These broader goals are: preparation for livelihood; getting equipped to fulfil roles and responsibility within family, society and the country; and becoming a ‘better person’- the connotation of which is contextually drawn. An articulation of the goals of education in the post independence phase provides a framework within which education is designed and implemented in India. Based on the recommendations of Education and National Development (1964), National Policy on Education (1968) recommended a radical reconstruction of education system for economic development, cultural development, for national integration and for realising socialist pattern of society. The goal of nurturing ‘better person’ is articulated as ‘the education system must produce young men and women of character and ability committed to national service and

development.’ Following the policy framework, the school, as a significant institution of education, employed various mechanisms to fulfil its functions through curriculum and its spatial and temporal arrangements. The challenge for the schools has been: can it fulfil all the three functions or only some? If it cannot fulfil all its functions then will there be another form to fulfil the functions that schools cannot fulfil? If other forms are established then what will be the nature of the forms?

The contemporary schools and society faces the challenge of prioritising among the three goals of education as these become fiercely competitive. The goal of preparing for livelihood assumes priority. The paradigm of scarcity dominates field of education in India making elimination of students at various stages necessary. Coupled with this is the perceived hierarchy of ‘jobs’ in society, which leads to fierce competition for admission to a few preferred institutions of professional education. The function of schools thus becomes preparing learners for this competition, ordinarily known as examination oriented schooling. At the same time the other two goals of education- getting equipped to fulfil roles and responsibility within family, society and the country, and becoming a ‘better person’ become a secondary focus. Two decades later, National Policy on Education, 1986, reiterates the significance of the other two goals, “The growing concern over the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society has brought to focus the need for readjustments in the curriculum in order to make education a forceful tool for the cultivation of social and moral values”. Value education thus is recognized as an important function of schools.

Schools face a challenge in prioritising between examination orientated education and value education. These two contemporary needs of society have influenced the form and function of schools. In doing this, it has thrown two specific challenges. First, is the function of schools to prepare learners for the competition for selection in courses of professional education? Secondly, whose responsibility will value education be? Both these challenges have given rise to new institutions and thereby raised questions of function for the institution of school.

Rise of Shadow Academic Institution and its Impact on Functions of School

The response to the first challenge has been the rise of shadow institutions of education variously known as shadow system of education or the parallel education or the tuition classes. Mainstream educational institutions refer to those educational institutions which are

recognized and certified by state and are affiliated to boards of education such as State Boards, Central Board of Secondary Education, Boards, Central Board of Secondary Education, International Baccalaureate, IGSC and ICSE. Shadow educational institutions on the other hand do not require recognition and certification by state or Boards of education. Bray (2007) has explained the appropriateness of the term shadow education: it is a shadow because a mainstream education exists, its features are less distinct than the mainstream education and it changes as the mainstream education changes. The emergence of shadow system of education has been observed in the education systems of the world with a strong presence in Asia. Bray and Lykins (2012) estimated that while shadow education grew at over 15 per cent per year in general, it was worth \$255 in Hong Kong and China in 2011 and that Japanese parent spend \$12 billion towards private tutoring. Though the phenomenon of private coaching classes in India has a large scale presence, the extent of its presence and impact is different in each state. Sujatha (2014) stated that among the four states sampled with varied socio-economic and political context, a strong presence of private coaching classes was observed in Kerala and a low presence in Andhra Pradesh. The relationship between school and the shadow institution of education has manifested the tensions between form and function in a distinct and interesting way. Three distinct phases of response of schools to these tensions can be identified as criticism; tacit acceptance and recognition; and amalgamation.

In phase one, the schools have been critical of the shadow institution. Schools therefore have focused on the supremacy of their institution by stating that their function is the overall development of the learner while the shadow institutions have limited function of preparing learners for examinations. To emphasize and demonstrate this, there has been a spread of co-curricular activities in schools. The shadow institutions, on the other hand, have been firm and unaffected by schools. The response of schools has further helped to clarify the function of shadow institutions, that it is seriously focused on academics and preparation for examination. This helps the prime stakeholder of school- learner and the parent – to choose and prioritise their attention and time between the two institutions. The spatial and temporal arrangement: the space of the school and the time table in school remained unaffected.

The relationship between schools and shadow educational institutions evolved to a second phase wherein there was a tacit acceptance and recognition by schools of the existence of shadow educational institutions. It was also acknowledged that their stakeholders- the

learners- participated in the shadow institutions. The school's response in this phase was that of accommodation. Schools' schedules attempted tacitly to accommodate the schedules of the shadow institutions. This also eased the burden on learners as they divided their study time between school and the shadow institutions. Till this stage, the schools retained their form but their function was shared by the shadow education. The spatial arrangements were unaffected but the temporal arrangement saw covert changes.

In phase three, the shadow institutions evolved to take the form of a school as there was an amalgamation of form and function of school and shadow education within the school. The state of Andhra Pradesh saw a transformation of private tutorial and coaching centres into private unaided schools which resulted in a low demand for shadow education (Sujatha, 2014). Another transformation was in the form of a Concept School. A Concept School is an educational institution which follows the function of preparation for examination, especially the board examinations. It, at the same time, has the form of a school as it is recognized as a school by state education authority. Learners and parents were relieved by this accommodation between the form and function. Though Concept Schools were established for class XI and XII and primarily aimed at preparing the learners for admission to professional courses, some mainstream schools have introduced these from class IX. Thus now form and function of school is retained and a part of its responsibility is entrusted to shadow education.

Rise of Shadow Co-Academic Institution and its Impact on Functions of School

The second tension between form and function of schools as an institution has been the function of value education. Though value education has been variously termed as moral education and lately peace education, in this paper the term value education is preferred as stakeholder-learners and parents- popularly use this term.

Value education is a contested zone between the institution of family and the institution of school. The contestations occur for two reasons. First, there is an inadequacy in each institution to cater to value education as the society becomes complex. Secondly, society also faces the problem of prioritising between valuing skilled learners with capability to earn livelihood and contribute to the economy or valuing learners with capability to live well as a citizen in society. The contestations are intensified as each of this institution expects the other to cater to it primarily. The schools endeavour to create a balancing act by offering to

learners a combination of curricular and co- curricular learning experiences. The shadow institutions as of now do not offer co-curricular learning experiences. With the accommodation of shadow systems of education within the school, the function of academics is a shared responsibility. Value education then forms a focus for the school. This function too is fraught with various challenges for schools: Will this function of schools to prepare better citizens for family, society and country through value education be taken over by other forms of institutions? Is there a shadow education system for value education? Will there be tuition classes for value education? If these alternative institutions develop, what will be the form and function of schools? There are two forms of responses to this.

First, some schools are established with a strong focus on value education which also becomes its defining characteristic. These schools have the philosophy of its founder or patron as the overall framework for the function of schools. The founders of school claim value education as their preferred function which is combined with the academic function. The stakeholders however do not always share this preferred function. Thapan (1991) has observed that the case of Rishi Valley School, which follows J Krishnamurthy's philosophy, indicates that there is a conflict between the value focus and the secular function of the school. In the absence of the founder or a strong leadership, the secular function takes precedence.

Another response is by various voluntary religious and community organizations which have adopted the function of value education for citizens of various age groups. These institutions invite voluntary membership for the learners as well as for the teachers. The curriculum is developed informally based largely on the major discourse of their patron leader and is continuously evolving. Currently, the voluntary nature of these institutions does not create a conflict with the form and function of school. At the same time, it does offer an alternative to the schools for the function of value education. Will the function of value education take the route of a concept school is a question which remains to be explored.

Conclusion

The emergence of shadow education system is an indicator of the extent to which the institution of school has been able to respond to the challenge of its form and function. In the case of academics, the amalgamation of shadow education within the mainstream education has given rise to Concept School. This amalgamation may pose more challenges in future:

will the shadow education become mainstream education? The challenge of the function of value education is yet to take a definite form. If value education is taken over by shadow education then the challenge for schools will be to search for a function for itself.

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