

Feature

Education

Some Innovative Approaches to Primary Education

by Zakaria Shirazi

LONGSIDE government effort, a few public innovators are applying various innovative schemes designed to attract the disadvantaged children to primary education, prevent dropout and to make primary education more sustainable.

Jamil Ahmed, a theatre activist, is introducing 'Theatre in Education' to make primary education more interesting for the learner and to raise his or her self-confidence and awareness about the vast possibilities of human life. His slogan is 'Education is a joy'.

Jamil Ahmed has chosen three primary schools for the underprivileged - two in the city and one in Baliakandi thana in Rajbari district. The lessons in the text are taught through dramatization, with children playing roles, personalizing the problems and issues discussed in the text books and bringing their own perceptions and experiences into play.

In this way students assimilate knowledge more deeply and joyfully and remain actively involved in and responsive to the process of learning. Theatre has the advantage of creating a laboratory situation where through improvisation and play acting children not only learn about problems but 'experience' these problems.

Although the method is still being developed, initial results are encouraging. Jamil Ahmed says that in the primary school in Baliakandi where he is applying his innovative method, attendance has improved significantly, even during pre-harvesting season when work in the field tends to keep disadvantaged students away from school.

He is all praise for the primary school teachers who, convinced of the effectiveness of his method, give their fullest cooperation. He thinks that in future the demonstrable success of his model will force the government to replicate it on a wider scale.

Dr Mohammad Ibrahim, a physicist who edits a science journal, is developing three years educational course for the underprivileged that has the component of technical skill to make education an income-generating activity. His 350 schools all over the country have enrolled 16,000 students all of whom are underprivileged. Upon enrollment they are trained in a locally usable technology.

It can be soap making or candle making or managing

tree nursery or for older children, repairing diesel pumps. Thus while children begin to learn the 3Rs they also begin to earn by marketing their skills or product. (Some kind of marketing arrangement is also there).

When education becomes financially rewarding, there can be no question of dropout and on completion of the three-year course, students leave school not only literate, but also technically skilled. The cost per child, according to Mohammad Ibrahim, is also lower than the regular schools.

He said that after completing the three-year course a student becomes fit to get admission, if he chooses, into class four of a government primary school. They have devised a syllabus based on the syllabus of the Board.

Is he not creating a parallel system that may cause confusion and hold back the goal of universal primary education? "No," affirms Ibrahim. "We are enrolling only those who would have remained out of the government primary school."

Why do so many poor children drop out from primary education? This question long exercised the mind of Ibrahim

Sobhan, another social innovator and executive of the Association for School-Based Education, a research group specialising in primary education. The cause of dropout is of course a complex mix of socio-economic factors.

His finding was that is possible to vastly improve the quality of classroom teaching and simplify comprehension and stimulate interest of the disadvantaged students at no cost at all - by simply increasing the period-length to 60 minutes from the traditional 30 minutes, keeping the total school-time unchanged.

A 60 minute period-length makes it possible to complete the lesson in class and even leaves some extra time for individual evaluation. This dispenses with the need for homework and it is homework that poses as a disadvantage to the poorer children whose home atmosphere and family situation are not congenial.

She cited the instance of prostitutes who have a sizeable income and are able and willing to spend money for their children's education but are unable to create for them the right kind of atmosphere at home. The number of these single mothers and working

mothers is increasing. She founded Uttsho, a residential school for the children of underprivileged single mothers and working mothers. Students at Uttsho receive food, clothing, education and all care and facilities of a residential school, but at a highly subsidised cost. The cost per student is Tk 1650 a month but Uttsho charges the mothers anywhere from Tk 100 to Tk 1000 according to income.

To meet the rest of the amounts, sponsors are contacted who undertake to make a donation, preferably in an annual lump sum. A sponsor may choose to tie his/her donation to a particular student or keep it a completely impersonal affair.

Leena emphasizes that Uttsho is a residential school and not an orphanage and frequent contact between mother and child are encouraged and family warmth is sought to be created. Leena feels great admiration for the sponsors all of whom are not wealthy but is fired by zeal of philanthropy for the cause of child welfare and scrupulously honours their monetary pledge.

Leena's project is still in its early stage and the number of children at Uttsho is still limited. She hopes to expand its enrollment and to build up its own financial base by undertaking income-generating activities like catering. She also hopes that the success of her project will prompt its replication by other individuals and organizations.

Is there anything common among Ibrahim Sobhan, Jamil Ahmed, Muhammad Ibrahim and Mahbooba Akhtar Mahmood Leena? Yes. All of them are Ashoka Fellows. Ashoka is an international fellowship network that gives support to individual change makers who dedicate themselves to public service.

There are 34 Ashoka Fellows in Bangladesh, 96 in India and 428 in the world over. They are working in fields like literacy, health, environment and agriculture. In Bangladesh their activities are slowly making an impact.

— Development Features



The challenge of education.

Educating Calcutta's Street Children

by Partha S. Banerjee

SIKANDAR wants to be a doctor when he grows up. When I cure people of their illness, they will bless me, says the undernourished 14-year-old boy, his eyes glistening as he speaks of his dream. And, of course, I won't charge fees for treating those of our community, our neighbours.

Sikandar's neighbours, like his family, are rural migrants from various parts of eastern India who live in shanties near Howrah Station, the sprawling principal rail terminus of India's largest city, Calcutta. His father, like most other men in the slum, is an unlicensed vendor, selling fruits to earn around US \$ 30 a month. And like most other men in the slum, he never seriously thought of sending his son to school.

But the Women's Coordinating Council (WCC), a non-governmental organisation that runs a school for street children near the rail terminus, changed the fruit-seller's

thinking. 'My father now only tells me to study and not to worry about helping him with his work,' says Sikandar. He has attended the free school since the WCC teachers visited his parents two years ago and spoke about the importance of education.

Schools like the WCC's are bringing a quiet revolution to the streets of Calcutta, home to an estimated 100,000 children. Most of them cannot gain admission to government schools for lack of a permanent address. While some like Sikandar are now daring to dream of becoming doctors or bankers, most others, says WCC's school coordinator, Nandini Basak, are simply 'confident theirs will be a better life than their parents'.

Most important, the schools are changing the way many shanty-town residents view education: No longer does it seem a luxury their children

cannot afford. India's adult literacy rate was only 48.3 per cent as of 1990. The Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) placed India's total adult illiteracy in 1990 at 280,109,000. Unenrolled primary school-age children numbered 24,629,000 while annual primary school dropouts totalled 12,390,000.

The first schools for street children in Calcutta were set up less than a decade ago. Today, more than 30 non-governmental organisations, with assistance and funding from a variety of agencies, including UNICEF and the Indian government, participate in educating Calcutta's street kids. Even so, barely 5 per cent of them are covered.

Apart from basic primary education — reading, writing

and arithmetic — the students also get some grounding in elementary science and hygiene. Doctors visit most schools once a week for medical check-ups. Students also get refreshments, typically buttered bread and fruit, after class.

The WCC school near Howrah Station, which is partly funded by the local Rotary Club, is a one-room affair with two teachers and around 50 mostly pre-teen children. There are no desks as the students sit on the floor.

Few street-children schools, in fact, can boast proper classrooms. Most make do with the shade of a tree or tarpaulin shelters at streetcorners.

'When it rains, we are often left with no option but to send the children home,' says Jharna Dutta, 25, who holds classes under a tree not far from Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying in Kalighat, south Calcutta. Dutta's school is run by the Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER), one of the largest organisations working with street children in Calcutta.

By increasing women's ability to earn an independent income, education raises women's status in the community thereby giving them greater input into family and community decision-making. Perhaps more important, education empowers girls with a basic knowledge of their rights as individuals and citizens of their nation and the world.

Girls' education contributes well to progress in development. Education provides women with the knowledge and skills to contribute to and benefit from development efforts, especially in areas of health.

Despite their commitment and innovative methods, most education specialists agree that non-governmental organisations can, at best, provide a stop-gap solution to the enormous problem of educating street children in Calcutta and other Indian cities. This is the government's responsibility,' says a Calcutta University Professor. But the country's performance in education has hardly been impressive, as demonstrated by its 52 per cent literacy rate.

The government's regular network of schools could cover these children,' argues Mallik. 'What is the need for a parallel system like ours when free government schools already exist? All that needs to be done is motivating the street children to attend class, allowing for flexible hours that would suit them anti being not so particular about permanent address.'

— Depthnews Special



The students of Shibrat Primary School, in a remote village in Gaibandha, watch waterfalls and mountains. The students learn not from their next books but from a demonstration laboratory in the school. The students learn about the river system of Bangladesh and active volcano. The school was established 76 years ago in 1916. A dilapidated school of the locality did not show any interest in the school's development. Today the village youngsters no more puff cigarettes publicly. Lately there is no incidence of thefts and burglary. The villagers give credit to Nurul Alam, the head teacher of Shibrat Primary School.

Photo: Rafiqur Rahman/Development Features



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Photo: Rafiqur Rahman/Development Features

Education

Trained Teachers: The Need of the Hour

by Ranjit Chandra Banik

TEACHING is a great art which is gained through training and experience. On this teaching profession depends the quality of our education.

Thus in the words of Gilbert Highest, 'Teaching is not like inducing a chemical reaction. It is much more like painting a picture or making a piece of music or on a lower level like planting a garden or writing a friendly letter. You must throw your heart into it. You must realize that it cannot all be done by formulas, or you will spoil your work and your pupils and yourselves.'

What kind of men and women then do we want in the teaching profession? There is a great deal of controversy over this issue. Some point out that people having a specific qualification and experience are fit to imparting teaching in the class-room.

There is still others to point out that people having a training and a general qualification of a specific area are fit to creating a congenial atmosphere in the class-room. They put forward the following arguments in favour of their statement.

With the advent of science and culture, students are confronted with the problem of what constitutes good and bad conduct, with the problem of how to distinguish between right and wrong, with the problem of how to decide between duty and pleasure and other mental problems.

All these problems keeping in view, a psychologist is of opinion that a trained teacher is very much helpful in classroom teaching. It is because, he points out that a trained teacher, teaches students how to use their senses properly.

Nevertheless, a trained teacher begins his lesson with the mother's encouraging look, the father's word of praise and approval, with the sister's sympathy, the brother's kindly help.

The students are, therefore, taught to feel to observe and to receive impressions. In this way, the mind is opened out. It is ready to receive, absorb and remember. So these steps a trained teacher may take in the class-room teaching. If one attends to these, everything else will follow.

Now how can we overcome

these draw backs? First teachers should not be confined to chalk and talk only. They must remember that the lesson is meant for the students not for the teachers. Hence students full co-operation must be maintained and they should be encouraged in writing on the black board. Lastly a teacher must talk in a lively vital.

Persuasive and enthusiastic manner to make the lesson fruitful.

The another method is an activity method where the student's participation in the lesson is required. Here students are considered as active being in stead of immobile being. The project method is one of the active methods.

A school for example may develop a project on town which involves a study of all aspects of the economic, geographical, historical, civic, racial and intellectual development of the town. But this method is defective because it requires immense material. Above all there is a problem of preventing a percentage of the pupils from aimlessly frittering away their time.

In this way a teaching and learning situation may be created in the class-room teaching. But in handling this method, one must be careful for it involves the whole class that may vitiate the congenial atmosphere of teaching.

Next comes the chalk and talk method of teaching whereby the teacher presents the facts of the lesson to the pupils and illustrates the essential points on the black board. This method involves two essential senses of pupils, namely hearing and vision, while administering this method, of teaching in the class, one must be careful because there are certain drawbacks in this method.

These are, (i) Students remain passive and inactive. (ii) Teachers kill much time in writing and talking with their backs to the pupils and thereby students get opportunities for talking (iii) Lastly there is always the danger that the lesson will develop too rapidly for the less gifted pupils.

His true object of teaching centres round intellectual discipline, a training of the powers so as to create a certain habit of mind, a skill and temper that can be set to work on facts and ideas with equal readiness. It is for this reason, Herbert Spencer remarks 'Never educate a child to be a gentleman or a lady only, but to be a man or a woman only.'

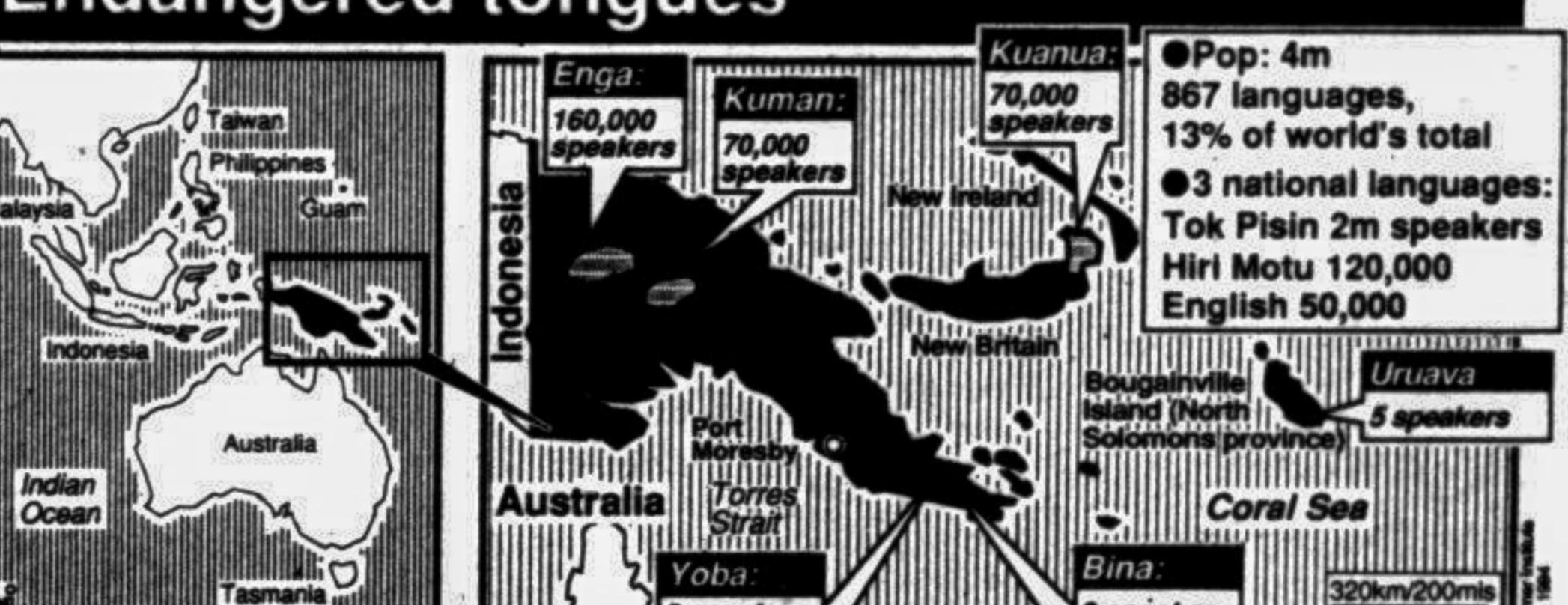
He will be himself. 'To thy own self be true' and one who is true to himself can not be false in anything.

Thus closely acquainted with the merits and demerits of the methods of teaching, a teacher can render a valuable service to the societies and the nation.

Five Languages Fall Silent — Only 867 Left

by David Robie

Endangered tongues



Two Papua New Guinea languages, each spoken by only two people as second languages, have virtually disappeared in the past five years.

The languages, Bina and Yoba, were discovered and recorded in a remote part of the South Pacific country's Central province as recently as 1981.

Three other languages have become extinct since 1950 and linguists fear a further 36 distinct languages are at risk of dying out.

The disappearance of five languages in the past four decades leaves the country with just 867 languages. But despite the falling numbers, PNG's four million people still speak 13 per cent of the world's 6,528 languages.

According to *Ethnologue*, Enga, a Highlands language with more than 160,000 speakers, is the largest language group. This is followed by Kuman, a language spoken by 70,000 people in Kundiwa, Kerowagi and Gembog districts of Chimbu province.

According to *Ethnologue*, Kuanua, spoken on the Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain province, also has about 70,000 speakers.

PNG's linguistic diversity is attributed to the geographical isolation of many tribes in the mountains forested terrain of the country's centre.

According to *Ethnologue*, Tok Pisin (pidgin derived from colonial German, English and tribal languages) and Hiri Motu, a trading language used along the Papuan coast before European contact.

An estimated two million people speak Tok Pisin as a second language, 120,000 speak Hiri Motu and 50,000 speak English.

Three languages are spoken in the country's National Parliament — English, Tok Pisin (pidgin derived from colonial German, English and tribal languages) and Hiri Motu, a trading language used along the Papuan coast before European contact.

One near-extinct language, Uruava, has only five speakers (they also speak a major language), who are found on the south-eastern coast of the North Solomons province.

GEMINI NEWS

Academic Feat

Al Muyeed Ahmed alias Shawon of Sun Flower Kinder Garten School has obtained the Bangladesh Kinder Garten Association Scholarship 1993.

Son of Shaheeduddin Ahmed, Shawon stood fourth in the grade-III of the scholarship examinations.

Presently, he is a student of class III at the Saint Gregory School.

Linguists are optimistic about the chances of this new policy saving the languages.

In the recent past, the most commonly quoted figure for PNG languages was 750.

However, the forthcoming