

Primary Education in Bangladesh

Anandaniketon : The GSS Way

by GS Smith

Imagine all the scenes and sequences of a story. Throughout the two and a half to three hours that the children are at school they find their way to books whether or not they can read themselves. Once an interest in reading is consolidated, the children are helped to acquire reading skills.

When you see something according to the GSS teaching methodology — a person, a picture or an object, you don't look at the parts, the strokes and lines, or the components, but at the whole thing. In reading one follows the same logic. One should let the children see as much as they choose to see — a word, or part of a sentence — and read what they see, naturally. The technique is simple: the teacher reads out to every child individually every day, and the child reads along. As the children begin to read themselves, they develop a keen interest to continue reading and learning more. They read because they enjoy stories and enjoy reading because they enjoy demonstrating to others that they are free readers.

The children neither need to look at the individual letters nor at the syllables to be able to read. Learning the alphabet and learning to read by spelling or by mastering the syllables only, confuses a child's images and makes acquisition of reading skills harder than it really is. How-

ever, acquisition of spelling skills is often necessary before the child can be expected to be a free writer. This means that during some of the time spent in school, children spell out what they read and in the process learn the alphabet.

Just one visit to an Anandaniketon primary school is enough to demonstrate to the most convinced skeptic how a book can be made much more interesting to a child than a toy, which loses its appeal once the child has learnt what it can and cannot do. Most toys are not creative enough to hold a child's interest in the way books can. At Anandaniketon one can readily see how acquisition of free reading and creative writing skills — the two finest tools of communication — is seen as one of the purest forms of pleasure, stretching a child's unlimited capacity to learn from today for tomorrow.

GSS uses as many as 8 books in class I, 14 in class II and 18 books in class III to provide variety. To make reading even more interesting, GSS presents many of its books in the form of challenging reading games. Other than the government prescribed primer, which GSS uses, almost all other materials are produced in-house. They are widely acclaimed as some of the best primary school materials produced in South Asia. GSS also produces a large

number of supporting materials.

Several other NGOs, including some of the largest ones, have been impressed by the GSS methodology, and now accept that availability of sufficient reading materials is a key input for new learners in developing a real interest in reading and becoming inde-

pendent readers. Others are also beginning to make more books available to their children. A single primer is neither stimulating enough nor does it contain enough material to hold children's interest.

Creative Writing From the very first day, when many children are unable to even hold a pencil properly, they are encouraged to draw. These drawings are often what we would describe as scribbles. GSS suggests that what we see as a 'scribble' is in fact very different from what the child sees. For children it is a drawing of images they have experienced; and it often represents something their 'mother' is doing. This is how children transfer images in the form of impressions and are able to draw a link between visual and written forms.

The teacher asks the children what they have drawn and writes beneath the drawing what the children say they have drawn in the child's own words. The teacher reads the newly written text out loud long with the child. The exercise continues on a daily basis for each child and gradually

helps children understand how speech is translated into text, demonstrating the amazing relationship between the verbal and the written forms.

The child is encouraged to copy the text the teacher has written. The child, not having acquired the skills to write, scribbles instead. They key to reaching a breakthrough, however, is the recognition of the scribbles as 'written text' and

failure. With a child-centred teaching system, instead of being treated as part of the classroom, the child is developed as an individual. This allows the teacher to pay attention to each individual child and thus allows individual learning to take place as well as allowing each child to develop according to their own ability and pace.

Group teaching: Child-centred teaching also means that each child must receive the same amount of quality time from the teacher every day. To achieve this, the teacher's time is carefully analysed and planned and time spent with individual children is maximized. Thus, time management is a key element in group teaching.

Group teaching in GSS involves three learning groups and three to four 'purposeful activity' groups sitting in the classroom. The three learning groups are: Bengali based written work (comprehension and handwriting), creative writing and project work combined and maths. The purposeful activity groups are engaged in using support education materials and playing with educational games (reading cards, maths cards etc). The teacher moves from group to group giving attention to individual children or to the group as a whole. No homework is given to the children.

Performance and learning achievement: GSS's professional approach to teaching is reflected in the way children are assessed and the way performance is monitored. Teachers assess the learning achievement of each individual child every two weeks and supervisors do a quarterly assessment of each child's learning achievement which is computerised centrally. In addition, the supervisors' findings are summarised locally on annual analysis sheets which are used in the preparation of annual reports for each child.

Over 90% of GSS children become independent readers and independent writers and master the four key concepts in math by the end of their second year at school.

The appreciation on the part of the teacher. In less than six months most children are able to draw their inner thoughts and express in written form what they have drawn. This exercise is carried out daily for each child throughout the year and the result is phenomenal. By the end of the second year most children can draw virtually any idea they are given and can write copiously on the subject.

The GSS Methodology GSS adapted the best of the primary education teaching methodologies developed in other countries for use in Bangladesh. It is unique in that such adaptation has been successfully carried out with innovations at every stage. The resulting methodology is child-centred interactive learning which involves group teaching.

Child-centred interactive learning: Under the traditional teaching system, the child is treated as part of the class rather than as an individual. The child has to learn and develop according to the pace set by the class as a whole. This inevitably leads to some children suffering from frustration and others from feelings of

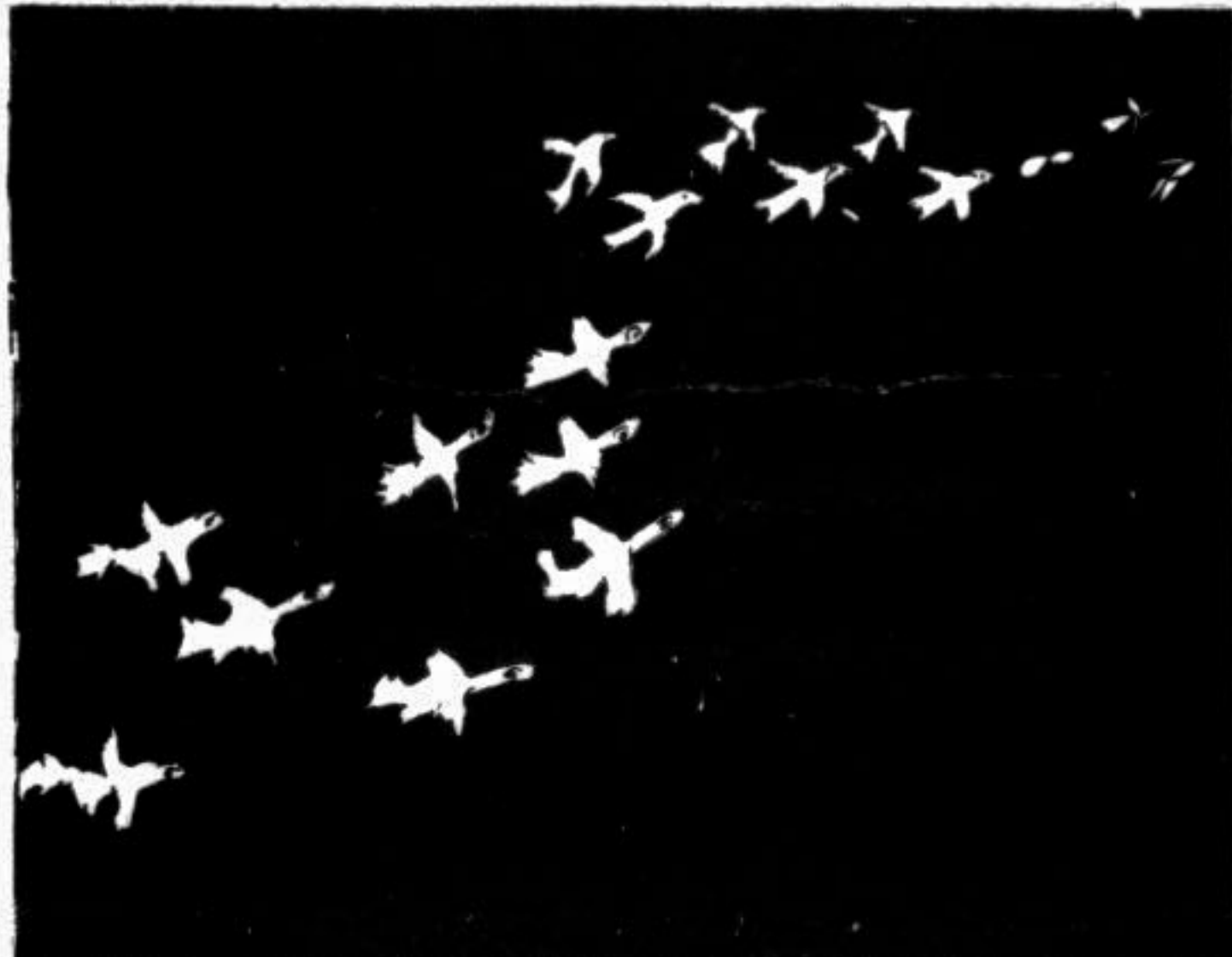


visiting education expert, at a diplomatic reception earlier this summer, speaking about the GSS primary education programme, had this to say. "This, to the best of our knowledge, is the only programme in the country where you see active learning taking place. You actually see the child-centred interactive learning methodology adapted to local conditions in the most innovative manner." So, what, exactly, is so special about Anandaniketon, the GSS primary education programme?

Take a typical GSS primary school, a neat building in the Trishal Thana of Mymensingh. A large signboard displays not only the name of the school, but also the names of the people who donated the land on which the school is built.

At 8:30 in the morning, some children are still busy playing outside the classrooms, while others are already attending class inside. Some of the children outside have set up little shops selling 'groceries' made of sand, leaves and stones. They use neatly made scales and weights of different sizes with numbers from 100g to 1kg painted on them. Other children are busy 'shopping', bargaining and paying with cardboard money of various denominations. This is real-life maths at its best, combining all four key functions and vocational practices.

Reading at Anandaniketon (the 'Happy Place') is like listening to the numerous fairy tales or ghost stories that grandma always seemed to know. The difference is that at school, sitting around the teacher, the children can see real pictures in brilliant colours, without having to



পাঠ্য পুস্তক পড়ার সময় ছাত্রের আঁকা চিত্র। এটি ছাত্রের নিজস্ব মতামত প্রকাশ করে।



The GSS method combines individual child-centred teaching (top) with group teaching. — Photos GSS

Attendance in GSS Anandaniketon schools is around 94% and drop-out over the three year period is less than 3%.

Future Plans By the end of June, GSS will run over 250 schools. GSS plans to build a minimum of 1700 schools over the next 4 years, using permanent low cost structures constructed on land donated by individuals in the local community. The unit cost of GSS primary education programme (per child per year and taking into account the depreciation value of the schools over a 10 year period) is about Tk 880 (US\$ 22).

Australia Wants to Become Asia's Educational Centre

by Vincent W. Stove

RECORD enrolments of Asian students are expected by Australian universities this academic year. The continent's determined effort in recent years to attract Asian students appears to be paying off with close to 45,000 foreign students expected to be enrolled at Australian universities this year. Most of the prospective students are from Asia.

Australia's campaign to encourage Asians to enrol in its schools reflects government policy to forge closer links with the neighbouring region. It is in keeping with Australia's desire to project itself as an integral part of the Asia-Pacific region.

The country is also determined to develop itself as an educational centre for the entire region. For the universities, the campaign makes good economic sense. Foreign students this year are expected to contribute about US\$400 million to their running expenses. They will help fund facilities and staff, especially at the smaller institutions.

Asian students represent big business for tertiary institutions. Just about all the major universities rely on fees from Asian students to balance their budgets. Said an administration official at one university: "Without the Asian students we would have to consider pruning some of our services."

Up till 1989, the Australian government subsidized the enrolment of foreign students. Most did not have to pay the full fees. But things are different now — foreign students pay

full fees. School charges vary a great deal depending on courses and universities. Top annual fees range from a low US\$11,250 at some universities to a high of US\$19,000. Some courses can be had for only US\$6,000.

Providing tertiary education for Asians is a big factor in Australia's international balance of payments.

Money spent by Asian students in Australia on fees, books, transport and general living expenses including ac-

commodation has doubled during the past three years. Some observers expect the figure to be close to US\$2,000 million by the turn of the century.

While school fees in Australia are generally comparable with that in North America and Europe, most Asian students find the cost of living in the continent lower. And, of course, it costs them less to come to Australia than to travel to the United States or Europe.

Australia's Employment, Education and Training Minister Simon Crean stated recently: "The monetary gains are considerable and obvious, but the real benefit for

and research systems, and this is being increasingly recognized by countries in the Asia-Pacific region as the demand for our expertise and educational services grow."

Hong Kong is the biggest sender of students with about 12,000 expected to be enrolled at Australian universities this year. About 10,000 will be Malaysians and nearly 6,000 Indonesians.

Australia has replaced the US as the main foreign destination for Indonesian students. The number of students from the Philippines is also increasing at the expense of US campuses.

Recent statistics show that about 64 per cent of Asian stu-

dents enrol in bachelor degree programmes, with roughly 14.5 per cent selecting diploma or associate diploma courses. About 14 per cent seek masters degrees and other graduate undertakings, with 5.5 per cent studying for doctorates or similar classifications. Only two per cent enrol in non-award courses.

Reflecting the surging economic activity throughout the region, almost half of Asian students gravitate towards studies associated with com-

merce, finance and business administration. Those seeking scientific knowledge comprise about 15 per cent, and just over 10 per cent prefer the humanities and social sciences. Another 10 per cent enrol in the engineering disciplines.

Students from Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore form the largest Asian contingents studying business and commerce subjects.

Sydney's University of New South Wales will probably enrol around 3,000 Asian students this year, representing about 12 per cent of the student body. They will provide roughly US\$26 million to the university's revenue.

Innovative Scheme Allows Post-grad Studies at Home

by Asif Khan

COMMONWEALTH students will soon be able to get a master's degree from foreign schools without leaving home.

Under a new scholarship scheme named after a former Prime Minister of India, about 100 awards to graduate students will be made initially in 1995. Fellows will enrol in the two-year Master of Distance Education Programme (MDEP) of India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which is based in India's capital city of New Delhi.

The course will be delivered by distance using a variety of media — from conventional methods such as correspondence to satellites. The Rajiv Gandhi Fellowships scheme is sponsored by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada, in association with IGNOU and with support from the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.

Students will be drawn from Bangladesh, Barbados, Eastern Caribbean, The Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Maldives, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zimbabwe.

They will be supported by local counsellors trained by COL. The Canadian institution will pay the fees for the course while other expenses will be met by the Foundation. As more resources become available, organizers hope to expand the programme to

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those distance education because it enables large numbers to take part in a programme at a fraction of the cost of conventional methods.

A COL-supported pilot project in Jamaica trains students denied access to high school by drawing on Australian experience. Students are placed with local companies. Training is controlled by the Caribbean Islands' National Training Agency using distance education methods.

Malaysia's Ministry of Health and the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia collaborated with COL on a joint project to create a distance education network for health training. An audio-graphics teleconferencing system is used to deliver a training programme in, among other things, family medicine, continuing medical education and health service management.

In Zambia, it cooperated with the National Correspondence College to establish a computer centre and a computer awareness programme adapted from the Open University of Sri Lanka. It aimed to support the development of a skilled workforce needed in the country. The programme particularly encourages women to acquire computer skills.

"Our long-term aim," they said, "is that any learner anywhere in the Commonwealth shall be able to study any distance-teaching programme available from any bona fide college or university in the Commonwealth."

Tanvir Mahmood Khan stood first in the Talim Pool in the Junior Scholarship Examination from Chittagong Collegiate School. He is grateful to his teachers, parents, uncles and aunts for his success. He also secured Primary Scholarship from Saint Mary's School, Chittagong. He is the second son of Professor Abdul Awal Khan of Chittagong University. — Abir brother of Tanvir secured 14th and 10th positions in SSC and HSC respectively under the Comilla Board.

Putting the Khmer Rouge Back in the Classroom

by Emilia Casella

Mock executions in the classroom were the result of attempts to educate Cambodian children about the country's bloody past. Now the government is trying a new approach.

IT is late afternoon and the yard at Chak Angre School is flooded with children. Boys are playing football, while under a tree a group of girls are skipping with a rope.

Cambodian school curriculum has made life more peaceful in the school grounds. Since the May 1993 elections, schools have stopped teaching an intensive history programme about the 1975-1979 reign of the Khmer Rouge.

Between 1980 and 1993 children from the age of seven had lessons of the Khmer Rouge time. They taught them of the torture and the killing and they put photos on the walls," says Top Siv Hun, head of the English department. "The lesson was to make them angry with the Khmer Rouge. But they were not angry

— they wanted to act like the Khmer Rouge," she said, describing war games in which children would "execute" their classmates.

April 17 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Khmer Rouge takeover of Phnom Penh, when the Maoist rebels forcibly evacuated the capital and began a four-year reign in which one million — including many of the country's educated people — were killed, starved or worked to death.

Today, more than half the country's nine million residents are under 20 years old. Most young people know the

what happened in the Pol Pot regime, because it is a history of cruelty and barbarism. We are afraid of the psychological impact on the children."

King Norodom Sihanouk has called on citizens to strive for "national reconciliation." The policy of the previous Vietnam-backed government, which used intensive lessons about the Khmer Rouge as a propaganda tool to maintain national anger, simply does not fit in with the policy of reconciliation, the official says.

Since the elections, the ministry has been re-writing the entire school curriculum — rebuilding the system from the ground up. It is a painfully slow

process. "Now history is difficult for us. Because of the change of regime, we have to write history according to the new regime," observes the official, adding that educators are waiting for a clear message from the government.

The fact that Cambodia is run by a coalition government made up of the royalist Funcinpec party and the communist Cambodian People's Party (which used to run the country with the backing of Vietnam) means there are divergent opinions about how history should be taught, explains George Taylor, a British educator advising the ministry.

The result is that while teachers wait for the new lesson plans, many of the more than two million schoolchil-

dren are currently taught about World War Two and the Nazi holocaust — but not about their own country's more recent genocide.

Peou Sorpong, a research fellow at the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, says it is vital that Cambodia develop a clear and detailed history curriculum, especially in senior grades and at the post-secondary level.

The government must teach the youth about the country's history and how to critically analyse it. It is an essential ingredient for peace and relations between the government and the governed.

— Gemini News Emilia Casella is a Canadian journalist currently in Cambodia.