

Learning without a Teacher

by M Mosharraf Hossain

FROM time immemorial, a teacher has been a unique symbol of knowledge. Concurrently, a philosopher and guide, a teacher has been treated as a light house to give a sense of direction to the learner. A teacher is also taken to be a reservoir of knowledge from which an introspective student or learner is just like a ship tossing in the rolling sea without a captain. Perceptually, a teacher enjoys a position next to the parents of a learner. The Great Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb, was learnt to have even admonished his ward for having behaved awkwardly once with his teacher at home. Emperor Alamgir was said even to have gone to the extent of saying that his son's teacher could be placed above the parents, if needs be. Conversely, and although unheard of these days, in the yonder years, a student could even risk his own life to save the life of his teacher. There is at least one such instance in Greek history. When Socrates was gaoled by the ruler of his time for defying to budge even an inch from his own political conviction and philosophy and awaited his impending death, one of his most favourite students born of an affluent parentage, Crito dodged himself into his teacher's cell. He made desperate entreaties with Socrates for giving in to the governmental pressure and thus save his life. But the great master would not and implored Crito on the other hand, to leave the place forthwith to save his own head instead. These are the teachings of history and glowing examples of how the teachers used to enjoy the proximity of their dear students.

Against such a serene and sanctified premise, there ap-

pears no way out to underestimate the great usefulness of a teacher in the lives of his students. Intriguingly, however, the metamorphosis over the past several centuries, has sustained a lot of change in the phenomenal importance of a teacher. In spite of such a situation obtaining in the most vulnerable area of teacher-student relationship, a good, lovable teacher is yet to fall in despair. He continues to enjoy the self-same confidence of and respect from his students who are real learners.

We have so far seen the teacher from a general, or rather, a conceptual point of view. This area is of course, vast and all-pervasive. Our concern shall be a narrower circle though it pertains to a very important aspect of skill development for improvement of the overall management of industrial and commercial ventures in the country.

There has been a redeeming feature, observed over the past few years that the people at the helm of affairs in the private sector industrial and commercial undertakings, have been, by and large, appreciating the necessity of having class room trainings to improve their managerial skills. The progressive ones in these sectors have been visibly more enthusiastic but, very often, time constraints have been blocking their attendance in training courses away from their respective work place. In order to overcome such practical difficulties facing them, an alternative had to be thought of.

The experts of management science and practices in the western world and in some of the developing coun-

tries were found locked in serious deliberations over the past several years on the issue. A tangible solution was conclusively dished out with startling revelations.

Surmised SDL or Self-directed learning, the new process has already proved itself as one of the most useful concepts in training. It is purported to be a training design in which trainees work at their own pace, without the aid of an instructor, to get to heart predetermined materials of learning.

SDL package demands four different analysis procedures which are considered vital to the process of creating self-directed learning opportunities. These are:

a) Job analysis;
b) Analysis of implementing process to be adopted for SDL package;

c) Format analysis to decide on the mode of implementation subject however, to available resources at hand and those to be borrowed from outside; and

d) Facilitator analysis to determine as to who will facilitate SDL packages.

The ultimate objectives shall be to guide the trainees through the package by indicating what skills they must master and what information is the most important. There must be a logical sequence in the formation of such objectives. Development of the contents of the package shall follow this exercise. If the mode of communicating with the trainees is a print medium the product of the step taken in this regard, shall be the words that the trainees will read or hear to help them master the objectives.

Communication may be made both through reading materials and exercises, and audio visual aid. In this connection, we should allude to another very interesting development obtaining in the field of management and training. It has been designated as Multiway Education through Distance Access Learning, briefly MEDAL which has been initiated in the sub-continent by Multi-Mode Multi-Media Training Services (Pvt) Ltd based in Bangalore, India. Known more by its acronym 4M, it is part of an international network committed to producing high quality educational programmes and products for dissemination of knowledge in specialized subjects.

The Mission Statement of MEDAL fringes on combining the power of the media and the convenience of the mode to make education more effective and efficient. It uses a multi-media manifestations from the knowledge base provided by the best available teaching talents which is thereafter disseminated on several media through wide ranging modes.

The course methodology comprises:

1. Learning Process that consists of absorbing knowledge through the senses and testing the extent of knowledge actually absorbed, the testing being done through exercises, assignments and examinations.

2. The Medial Process, following the conventional one, takes the form of a teacher-in-the-sky lecturing to the listeners either via satellite TV or a VCP/VCR which explains salient points. Audio tapes and printed notes are

also made available for the learners. Finally a floppy diskette with all elements of self-learning are placed at hand. All these comprise the multi-media kit which includes video tapes as well.

The L-E-A-R-N methodology has been a unique phenomenon in the modern management technology. Each letter of its represents the specific area of the methodology independent of others, particularizing the mode of dissemination of the knowledge to be imparted. They are:

'L' stand for lesson: The form of study material shall be both Video and Audio and the mode of transmission shall be Satellite TV and/or Courier Service;

'E' represents examples such as audio, paper and disk while the mode of transmission shall be courier service agencies;

'A' denotes appraisal and its form of study material shall be paper/disk where the mode of transmission shall be courier service;

'R' signifies review with paper/disk as the study material while courier and express mail service supplement the modes of transmission; and

'N' is for notes having paper/disk as study material and the mode of transmission being courier.

The Multi-Media Product Range includes a detailed management knowledge base to cover five major management areas presented in 101 episodes on a range of multi-media products, such as, video, audio, diskettes and paper.

The writer, an eminent management consultant is Managing Director, Rapport Bangladesh Limited.

The Need to Share Medical Experience

An Interview with Dr Abu Sajjad Alam
Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynecology
by Aasha Mehreen Amin



For good, professional doctors with the latest medical know-how. Unfortunately, however, many such doctors lose their enthusiasm as soon as they arrive to find themselves being cold shouldered by their compatriots. Dr Abu Sajjad Alam a specialist in Obstetrics and Gynecology successfully practising in the US, feels that the negative attitude towards Bangladeshi doctors living abroad whether due to apathy or professional jealousy, discourages doctors like himself who wish to share their expertise in Bangladesh.

The main intention of coming here, says Dr Alam, was to see if he could introduce new medical techniques in gynecological procedures and also train some of the younger doctors. Gynecological laparoscopy is one of the new techniques Alam wishes to introduce here. Laparoscopic procedures include even hysterectomies and involve much less pain, with less blood loss to the patient than normal surgery. "The post operative healing is much faster (the procedure involves a small incision in the navel and two cuts in the lower abdomen) and the patient can go home on the second day. Many of the younger doctors, says, Alam have been impressed with such techniques and are very eager to learn from an experienced doctor.

With a residency in obstetrics and gynecology (OB/GY) from St Vincent's Hospital in New York, Alam went on to New Jersey to start his private practice which has been successfully functioning for the last 16 years. As the first non-white doctor to be the chairman of the department of OB/GY and Head of Quality Assurance, Alam has a reputation as a dedicated capable doctor at the private clinic in Summit, a town where he is the only foreign doctor.

More recently, Alam has been involved in voluntary service in Haiti. Now Alam wishes to come to Bangladesh once or twice a year to train doctors and give lectures on latest techniques. "But, says Alam, "I find that I am not well accepted or given the proper respect in my field here. People are not very cooperative or enthusiastic about using my knowledge". "We all want to give back something to our country, but this attitude makes it very difficult for us," he continues.

Alam believes that there should be better networking among doctors here and abroad so that the latest techniques can be applied in Bangladesh. Young doctors should be given proper training by their seniors not only in medical techniques but also in medical ethics such as patient-doctor confidentiality and proper behaviour with the patient.

Moreover, he says, the experience of Bangladeshi doctors abroad should be used to improve the quality of medical care in the country. "But first of all we have to be given the respect and recognition — only then will it be worth coming here."

Bright Sparks Celebrate a Brilliant Friendship

Chilombo Mwondela writes from London

Sometimes, being very intelligent can have its drawbacks, as gifted children often discover at school. But a society founded 50 years ago offers fraternity, fulfilment and a meeting of minds to people blessed — or cursed — with a high IQ.

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD Daisy Downs had a tough time in her early school days. She had difficulty relating to classmates and was often bored. Her mind was on other things.

The "problem" faced by Daisy, an otherwise normal, healthy young person with a keen interest in pop music and pretty clothes, is that she thinks like lightning. Like thousands of other young people with an exceptionally high intelligence quotient (IQ), Daisy, from Kent in south-east England, was silently crying out for special stimulation of the mind.

She found it in Mensa, the society for people with high IQs, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. "I'm happy being a member of Mensa because I can be with people who share my interests, and there are so many things to do that I don't get bored," says Daisy.

"Having a high IQ doesn't make me feel weird or special. It's just how I was born, and I'm glad that my fellow Mensa friends accept me like this, and do not make me feel like an alien."

When Daisy was a baby her mother, Anne, a teacher, spotted her daughter's remarkable signs of development, and later arranged for private schooling. Even so, Daisy says: "It took me ages to get the teachers to give me enough work to do. I was a bit ahead of everyone else."

Last year, she sat a scholarship examination to try to win a place in a special private high school — and completed the work in 15 minutes, picking up three scholarships in the process. This year, she will be sitting secondary-school exams that are normally taken at the age of 16.

Her parents got in touch with Mensa several years ago

Brain-teasers

Problems from Mensa's weekly puzzle paper
Mensa logo

The following words have a connection. What is it?
ARCHIVE
DILLY-DALLY
MESSAGE
BAYONET

A caterpillar crawls at a speed of 21 inches per hour towards a vegetable patch. After being overindulgent it returns, over exactly the same distance, at only seven inches per hour. What is the caterpillar's average speed over the entire journey?

A special dartboard has only eight segments. The segments are numbered clockwise from the top as follows: 15, 3, 6, 4, 12, 5, 10 & 8. The number on each segment corresponds with its unique point score. How many different combinations are there to score 18 on this dartboard using three darts only? Each dart lands in a segment and no dart falls to the floor

Answers: 1 ARCHIVE DILLY-DALLY MESSAGE BAYONET contains a homophone - each word contains a 'y'.

2 10.5 inches per hour

3 16

alter hearing that the society runs a foundation to assist gifted children.

The foundation runs courses to help young Mensans develop their talents. Its director, Mark Piobeam, says: "Most children who are members were not successful in ordinary schools because the pace of learning was too slow for them and they tended to lose concentration."

Mensa sprang out of a meeting half a century ago in England between two clever men — Roland Berrill, a barrister and Lance Ware, a scientist and lawyer. During their discussion, they realised there was a need for a forum in which people with super-sharp minds could express themselves and be fully understood.

Mensa is Latin for table — around which members can sit and swap ideas to their

hearts' content in an atmosphere of equality.

To reach this level of equality, however, your IQ must be at least 148 — which puts you in the top two per cent of the population. Average human IQ is 100 on a scale based on scores achieved in intelligence tests. Daisy scores 178.

To qualify for Mensa membership you must take a supervised test.

Some people are suspicious about such measures and about the society, says Piobeam, a 57-year-old photographer. They think: "Maybe all those advanced brains are planning something. Maybe they are making plans to take over the world."

I must say that not a lot of people outside my Mensa friends know that I belong to it. Other people tend to feel threatened when they dis-

cover it, and I try not to talk about it unless I'm asked."

Mensa is not "a snobbish sort of society," he says. This point is supported by the fact that British socialist MP Dennis Skinner, a politician proud of his working-class background, is a member. Some Mensans are leading scientists; others are lorry drivers.

People join the society "to be fulfilled — to find a place where they fit in and can interact effectively," says Mensa's public relations manager, Richard Milton.

We welcome people from all over the world whose IQ is in the top two per cent of the population, with the objective of creating a community that is non-political and free from all racial or religious distinctions.

Since its birth, membership has grown to 38,000 in Britain, 2,500 of whom are children. Worldwide membership is more than 100,000, and there are now 24 national societies and a London-based Mensa International which seeks to encourage the formation of new ones.

Frequent meetings are held at a local and national level. The society has more than 100 special interest groups ranging from astronomy to Zen Buddhism, including popular themes for people such as Star Trek sci-fi fans and beer-lovers.

For its golden anniversary in August, Mensa is organising a host of special events in London and Manchester, including a concert by member musicians, an arts festival, carnivals, debates and a star variety show featuring comedy, drama and music performed by members.

GEMINI NEWS
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Dwindling Greenery in Bangladesh

by Shakil Akhter and Ashok Prasad

HISTORICALLY Bangladesh was well endowed with diverse types of plants but the percentage of tree coverage has declined and is continually declining at a most alarming rate. Presently the total forest coverage is about 14 per cent but the effective tree coverage stands at 6-8 per cent only, whereas a country should have 25 per cent of its land under forest cover for ecological balance.

Because of the depletion and other factors, species richness of flora is rapidly diminishing; many plant species are facing extinction in the country and many are listed as threatened and endangered; 27 species of vascular plants are recorded as endangered. If this dwindling process continues, our existence and that of generations to come may be jeopardized beyond recovery.

Population explosion, acute poverty, unemployment and consequential deforestation are the main factors working for this undesirable but inevitable condition. However, the following factors also play significant role in the dwindling process: urbanization, natural calamities, unawareness of the people, improper management of the forest resources, conversion of forest land into other uses, e.g. agriculture, encroachment on forest lands, shifting cultivation, illicit felling of trees, pilferage of forest resources.

We are already experiencing desertification, particularly in the north western districts, greenhouse effect and resultant inundation of low-lying areas, accelerated soil erosion, increasing occurrence of catastrophic cyclones and flood, land becoming unsuitable for agricultural crop production due to loss of soil moisture during the dry season, loss of wildlife habitat, decreasing animal population, disruption of ecological equilibrium.

Consequences

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The ultimate effect is that the whole country would become unsuitable for human habitation in future.

Suggestions

People will have to be made aware of the need of trees and forests in our life.

Massive afforestation programmes should be carried out.

Forestry extension programmes should be initiated to make people aware and to ensure their active participation.

Community forestry and social forestry programmes with the general people's active participation in every step, should be implemented.

The greenery can be increased by improving the existing forest lands and developing more forests on degraded and marginal lands like river and canal banks, embankments, roadsides, railways, institutional premises and so on.

Agro-forestry concept should be developed and practised for sustainable production of both agricultural and tree crops, as well as for environmental conservation.

Incentives in terms of money, training (e.g. in nursery raising techniques), inputs (e.g. seed, seedlings, fertilizer etc) and other technical information should be provided to the local rural people to motivate them towards tree planting.

As some NGOs are working well in the arena of forestry, their endeavours should be appreciated and encouraged and provided with all out assistance from the government sector.

A comprehensive list of flora including all lower plants along with their present status and recovery plan is needed to be chalked out for proper conservation and management of plant species in the country.

Due attention should be paid to both in-situ and ex-situ conservation of floral resources.

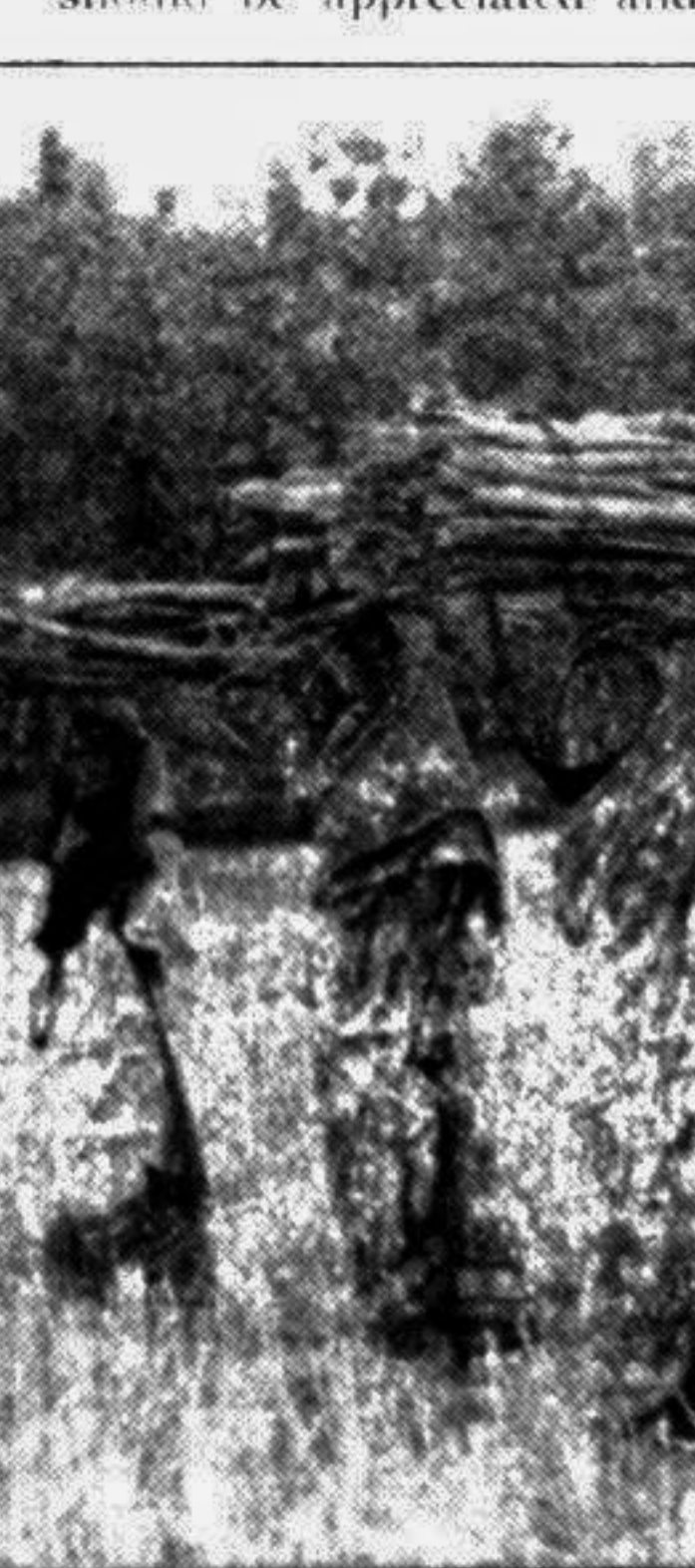
Introduction of fast growing and valuable exotic species should be done through proper species selection and provenance trial.

Human resources development through different training programme should be carried out.

The writers are with the Institute of Forestry University of Chittagong.

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Beasts More 'Benign' Loggers than Machines

INDISCRIMINATE logging and clearing of forests has been destroying the habitat of elephants, contributing to their decimation.

An endangered species, elephants now number less than half of their estimated population of 100,000 or so at the turn of the century. In Asia they are found in 13 countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia (Kalimantan and Sumatra), Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

But elephants themselves can in fact reduce much of the damage to forests that results from wasteful mechanical logging.

"The elephant, used selectively for logging operations in sensitive areas, could be the basis for a comparatively benign, much less destructive mode of resource extraction," say Charles Sanjapillai of the World Wide Fund for Nature in Indonesia (WWF) and Widodo Sukohadi Ramono, chief of Bogor's Species Conservation Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation, in a paper written for the Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

In most part of Asia, they note, these huge beasts were once the backbone of the timber industry. In Myanmar, more than 5,000 trained elephants are still used in teak lumbering.

The authors cite the advantage of using elephants in logging operations.

A fully trained elephant is a lifetime investment. In Thailand a 20-year-old timber elephant, whose working life may continue for another 30 years, costs US \$6,000 to US \$10,000.

"Compare this with the US \$100,000 to \$140,000 price of a crawler tractor, with a working life of only six years and the requirement of a continuous supply of air-polluting diesel fuel," the authors say.

Secondly, elephants do not require the construction of expensive logging roads needed to permit the entry

of heavy machinery.

The establishment of such roads not only destroys a great deal of forest growth by itself, but opens the interior to slash-and-burn farmers and poachers, who often follow loggers and level whatever forest growth remains after the prime timber has been cut," the authors point out.

Unlike machinery, elephants do not rust, corrode or pollute the environment, and do not need expensive spare parts.

Moreover, the elephant's dung can be used as fertilizer and agent of seed dispersal in the forest, automatically reforesting even as they remove trees.

Even the elephants' feeding — on grass and bamboo which are part of forest undergrowth — can contribute to forest preservation. Their feeding things the undergrowth and enhances the germination and growth of

many tree seeds, thus fostering reforestation.

The animals cause less damage to the land than heavy machines, whose wheel and tread cuts create erosion channels and whose weight causes soil compaction. Trained elephants can work throughout the year under any weather conditions, even in rain and mud that stop machines.

In some terrains, like freshwater swamp forests or on very steep hills, elephants are the most cost efficient means of timber extraction, if not the only means.

The only setback is that the rate of extraction of timber using elephants is slower than with machinery, making them uneconomical in the short term.

Reasons for the falling elephant population include indiscriminate hunting, habitat destruction through logging and slash-and-burn agriculture, and the retaliatory attacks of farmers whose expanding croplands are frequently devastated by the movements of increasingly hemmed-in elephant populations.

Depthnews Young Asia



JAMES BOND
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY MORRIS



TOM and JERRY



TOM and JERRY



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