TEENS and TWENTIES

Education Special

The Ethics of Tutorials

By Nameer Rahman

IN 1972, English as a medium of instruction in schools, was banned, in an effort to promote Bengali nationalism and to foster a comprehensive and more varied use of the national language. This drastic reformation of the schooling system had serious implications as far as the English medium students were concerned. It meant that hundreds if not thousands of students wanting to sit for the UK based English medium 'O' and 'A' level examinations would be unable to complete their studies. Their only hope was to find ex-English medium teachers and/or students and have regular private sessions with them. This practice gained momentum, and as a result teachers started holding regular classes with twenty to thirty students in each sitting. With the ban on English medium schools still in effect, the teachers had to find a way to circumvent the law, and hence the advent of the "Tutorial," which in theory are not schools but private teaching centers with English as the medium of instruction. During the mid to late eighties these institutions were set up at a phenomenal rate, (most notably in the Dhanmondi residential area, which has a tutorial on practically every street,) to fill the void created by the demand of parents wanting their children to complete their studies in the British system, thereby enabling these students to proceed on to universities abroad. This unrestricted and highly unregulated mushroom growth of the "Tutorial" gave rise to a number of practical problems, and several yet unanswered questions.

With the extraordinary dominance of the private tutorial as opposed to public sector schools, it has become imperative that the nomenclature, role and future of the English medium tutorial is redefined as soon as possible.

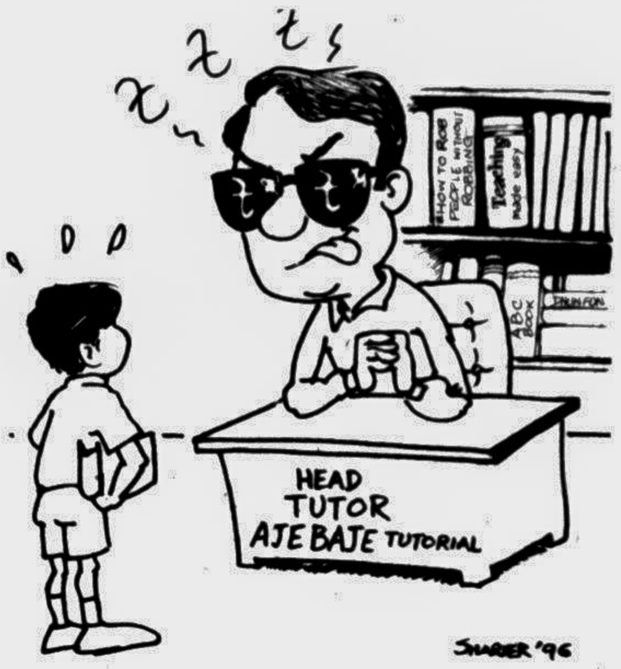
Not a single one of these schools/tutorials are either registered with the Ministry of Education, nor are their activities regulated by the Board of Education, or for that matter any other regulatory body. None of them are ever visited by inspectors from either the Ministry of Education or any other government body. Parents Teachers Associations are unheard of. In essence business is conducted without the hindrance of checks and balances, to the extent that there is not even an informal Association of English Medium Tutorials.

Grades 1 to 8 must provide the students with a solid base of preparatory work that should be the stepping stone for their 'O' and 'A' level syllabus. During these formative years no two tutorials maintain either the same syllabus or the same timetable. Even though it may not strike many people, these are the most important years in a child's academic life. It is during this time that a child aims, objectives, and talents are identified. He should be nurtured, guided and encouraged to pursue the areas and fields in which he shows promise and interest. Unfortunately these eight years are possibly the most disorganised and haphazard in any and most schools. The subject content taught vary widely from school to school. The books lists are not consistent with one another and often vital chapters and topics crucial for future work and understanding are neglected. In the middle of this chaos the childs natural interests and talents are crushed and buried irrevocably.

Grades 9 to 12 are important because it is during these years that a students career and future are decided. He will decide at the beginning of the 9th grade which subjects he will specialize in, setting the stage for the area of study in university. The choices made should not be made by the parent or the student alone, but by the parent, the teacher and the student together, in conjunction with the students interest, the teachers professional advice and recommendation and the parents wishes and guidance as to which profession he is to follow. Even though the syllabus is more clearly defined at this stage by the London Board of Education for the 'O' and 'A' level, the pace, depth and the course taken to cover the syllabus is left to the teacher. Should he teach too slowly the students can't review their work at the end of the year before the final examination, should be teach too fast, chances are a clear understanding of the subject will elude the student.

Unfortunately, there is no given timetable that is uniformly applied in all tutorials. Consequently, each teacher teaches at his or her own pace, which frequently results in students not having sufficient time to review their work thoroughly. The mocks are often held too close to the finals to make any real difference, and students locate their errors and weak points far too late for them to rectify.

Since so much is left up to the teacher, the second question naturally is one of teacher qualification. Qualified teachers are the most important factor in any educational institution. They should not only be fully versed and literate in the subjects they choose to teach, but also emotionally and psychologically suitable to deal with the raw materials of their chosen profession, that is to say, the adolescent. Teaching is a profession, a vocation, and at its best, a dedication. It is not a part time job, or something people do for a little "pocket money". The teacher is required to put in as much if not more day to day study as the student. This is not to be taken lightly, for the simple reason that a teacher's errors can cost a student his future.



When one considers the number of bored housewives who have earned considerably more than just a little pocket money over the years, and in the process acquired the trappings of pseudo-educationists, one can't help but cry out loud for mandatory qualification. A few years at a government run teachers training institute would be most welcome and would do a world of good to the entire academic atmosphere of the tutorial community of this country. You wouldn't dream of going to an unqualified doctor. However reluctantly, thousands of parents are compelled to place their children in the hands of sometimes literally semi-literate teachers who often can't manage their own unruly sons and daughters.

On a lesser scale, one might ask what facilities these tutorials have to offer? Even during schooling hours recreation is as much a part of a child's education as study. Extra curricular activity serves as a creative stimuli in fields other than academics. It is meant to expand the students horizon and should not be neglected. Unfortunately, unlike the government schools, most private institutions have little or no such facilities whatsoever. Most of these even lack the basic playing field. This is because the tutorials are actually hastily converted residential houses that were never meant to be schools in the first place. As a result these hallowed halls of learning sustain a density of population far in excess of their capacity. Classrooms are overcrowded to the bursting point increasing the student teacher ratio to the point where any hope of personal attention is completely lost.

Education is an industry, mass producing assembly line students with almost total impersonality. Tutorials are big business and the time has come when a line must be drawn between private sector schooling as purely a business venture and the need to educate the younger generation. A balance must be struck between being financial institutions and/or educational institutions, with an eye to what the middle class can afford. The practice of "donations" in order to secure a child's admission should be ott lawed. There are no guidelines, restrictions, or bodies that control or oversee the doings of this sector. As a result this area of our country's educational system is totally ungoverned. The monthly fees are astronomical in some schools, and are increased without notice, often the rise is greater than the corresponding rise in the quality of teaching or facilities available. Nevertheless parents and students feel compelled to employ half a dozen private tutors. Many students allege that if they don't go to their school teachers privately they are not given pass marks in the tests and exams. Nepotism, favouritism and corporal punishment are only some of the issues that need to be addressed openly.

Despite the false prestige and elitism of the tutorial, Bangla Medium schools are still producing better specimens who obtain higher SAT grades and ultimately the best jobs. With a new government in office hopefully both parents and students who are virtually hostages of the English medium monopoly can look forward to a better deal. Otherwise the millions given by well intentioned donors such as the World Bank and others will only serve to increase the bloated egos and the bulging pockets of the knowledge robber barons.

Communication gap between teachers and students

The Role of Student Counselors

by Romel Shahrukh Mostafa

NO system is immaculate; the education system now prevalent in the local English Medium schools is no exception. Among the ills, the communication gap between the faculty members on the one hand and the students on the other, appears to be something for which students are paying a very high price.

So, what makes this gap catastrophic? The following example common to our experience should provide us with an answer.

Suppose we are in a classroom, where a teacher is teaching twenty-five students. A student, sitting in the third row, feels that there are some facts he finds rather perplexing, and thus need to be clarified. But he remains silent, thinking "the teacher may be bothered" or even "perhaps what I'll ask is something the others already know ..... they'll think I'm a blockhead!" If those facts form the integral part of the discussion, by the time the class is over, the student will have acquired nothing but a sketchy knowledge of what has been taught. This poor assimilation will certainly encourage misconceptions.

And this is not all. If the discussion is followed by courses that are somehow related to it, it is evident that the student will not be able to grasp them with confidence. The maxim, "A misconception breeds misconceptions," also applies here; at the end of the courses the student's mind will be heaped with disillusions! The final result: a poor performance in the term exam.

Most of those who acknowledge the enormity of the damages caused by communication gap tend to put the blame widely on teachers, arguing that the faculty members' limitations and rigidity are its main roots. While some over look the shyness and different perceptive abilities of students, many almost neglect other constraints of educational framework: the relatively big size of classes (25 students on average), the inadequate allocation of time (approx 45 mins for each period) and not to mention the vast syllabuses. Understandably, working through such constraints, even an ideal teacher could find it difficult to concentrate on all the students individually.

A pragmatic solution, then, for closing such a 'gap' is to recruit a person who will provide ample time for every student, on an individual basis, inorder to discuss his problems and his relationship with his teachers, study him (his behavior, reactions etc), and keep a good track of his performance. All these activities should undoubtedly enable the entrusted person to figure out the students' deficiencies. He then approaches the concerned teachers and inform them about the students' difficulties. The teachers then put every effort to meet what the student lack in their next classes. Such 'bridging' the communication gap between the teachers and students by a third person is often defined as the role of counselling. Unfortunately, only a few number of schools have introduced this effective approach in their framework.

Recently, I agreed to offer my services as a student counsellor to a local prestigious school. Initially, the task of getting my students to express their problems freely seemed formidable. However, with the passage of time, my sense of purpose got the better of my initial amateurism. I observed that the best way to communicate with them is to regard their views with respect and to keep their opinions extremely confidential. Moreover, a counsellor should always show his sympathy, no matter how insignificant a student's problems are. This particular factor makes a student visualize the counsellor as some one close to him. Naturally, a trust builds up between them, and gradually the student becomes less hesitant to discuss his deficiencies.

Counselling becomes fascinating when you come to appreciate different behavioral patterns of students. Generally speaking, shyness is not common to students of Class IX and X. Perhaps the demands for scholarly preparations compel them to 'open their mouths regardless of their fear. Shyness do prevail among the students of lower class. However, this may not cause an acute problem for those studying in classes VI and below. The reason is very simple. When a teacher finishes explaining, he usually asks his students whether they have been able to understand what he has said. The students in return, provide the teacher with an instant response, in an unison, "yes sir! we do!". If, however, the response is a faint one, a sincere teacher would reexplain and the process is repeated until a loud, shriek response is heard.

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It is in fact, the students of grades VII and VIII who are the main victims of their shyness. At their early teens, the students become increasingly aware of their surroundings and become more sensitive to criticisms from the teachers and the peers, as well. Many teachers do not adopt the above 'ask and instant response system,' considering their students no more as children, the cumulative result is nothing but a wide similar communication gap which makes a counsellor's job more challenging.

Many students show excessive fear for a set of teachers. In some cases, this fear has arisen out of nothing, but students' misconceiving of a teacher's attitude. This is what I call the 'pseudo-master-phobia'. In this regard, a counsellor should immediately correct these disillusions among the students. 'your teacher may be reticent, his teaching techniques may demand you of a no-nonsense approach but that does not mean you should be afraid to put forward your questions". These words often work magically, they seem to infuse the indomitable courage in the students that enable them to speak up and clarify their problems. And it is not long before a close rapport between the teachers and the students is developed.

It is widely conceived that with the introduction of counselling in the education system make teachers feel uncomfortable. Well, that is no so, as far as I could gather from my interactions with them. I find teachers open-minded and cooperative, and they even heed to more hints.

So far, we have focused on a counsellor's duty in bridging the gap between the faculty members and the students. There are other vital roles, of course. A student may have complications at home that could reflect his performance at school. In such circumstances, the counsellor should pay an extra attention to help him carry out his works efficiently, and, if needed, the counsellor should not dither to have a candid talk with the concerned parents.

A student is usually unaware of his talents. A counsellor should be able to recognise this, encourage the student to keep up the good work and make every possible arrangements to facilitate the promotion of such a system.

"The role of a student counsellor is similar to that of a child psychologist," says one of my colleagues, working in a local English medium school. Yes, only a person who understands children can effectively solve a student's personal problem, such as his unability to get on well with his peers.

The recent mushrooming growth of English medium schools has left parents with more choices. The parents have become very selective and seek for schools that can provide their children with high standard education. And to maintain such a standard, counselling is indispensable. It is about time the vast majority of the schools come to realize its importance and thus introduce such a system in their curriculum.

An Ode to Ambrosia

by Asrarul Islam Chowdhury

So, the charade is over you say
And gone with it is the laughter, the sorrow and the pain
I truly was a fool, as I did not cry
For that would have showed my numbness
And with it I would have lost my pride
So, I saved all the tears for today
A man, a child, a fool; whatever you say
I just had to shed all those ashen tears away.

Last night when I was walking on the shore
Hearing the music of the waves
Reflected from the blueness of the sea
I dreamt of your presence
But then, dreams are meant for the heavens
And yet, knowing it will give me nothing
I go again and again to that shore
For it gives me tranquility and hope.

Ever since we said, each others path we would not stride
I knew I'd meet you some day, which was actually a vain cry
This world, this melody, this beauty I have
All mean nothing to me now, they fall like the autumn leaves
Just madly waiting for the winter snow to arrive
And yet, for some reason, I don't know why
You also think the same as I do, though it may exaggerate
Heaven help us, two battered warriors on two different sides.

The times have changed, I know, and are still changing now
But the sun, the moon, and the stars, they're always the same
An ode to you, the most cherished thing I have to offer
Although we can never bring back the past, I know
So, here I am once again on that shore, where we first met
A toast of ambrosia in your honour I'll have
And then sleep the hours away, only to wake up and see
That life will never stop and, again it's just me and me..

The Insurgence of ECA

by Shazaad Ahmed

THIS year Scholastica continued to display it's excellent academic reputation and the O'Level results for the January 1996 sessions is one of the many examples. 50 students appeared for examinations in 330 subjects. There was a total of 239 A's, 53 B's and 31 C's. On top of that 12 students got straight A's and 16 students got A or B grades in all subjects. Its not purpose to discredit any of the educational institutions in this country. After all, I'm sure there are other schools with more impressive records. My intent is to discuss the fact that along with the academic curriculum, there is a growing interest in extra curricular activities. More and more schools, Scholastica being one of them, are starting to understand the importance of liberating students from the rigidity of the class-rooms and enable them to express their talents in the fields of drama, sports, art, debate, literature and music.

When I first joined the school in 1989, our extra curricular activity was confined to weekly debates based on banal issues with easy answers and solutions. However Scholastica made it's mark in the field of interschool debate organized by St Joseph Debate Federation in 1991 with much of the credit going to Golam Chowdhury, Scholastica's representative. South Breeze, DIT and St. Josephs were among the seven competitors and after weeks of tackling issues ranging from Democracy vs. Capitalism, Human Rights, Womens' Rights and Child Labour, St. Joseph and Scholastica reached the finals with the letter emerging as the victor.

But Scholastica's excellence in this particular field did not end there. In February of 1992, members of the Dhaka University chose four students from Bangladesh to attend a function in London financed by the 'London Daily Observer.' Accompanied by Mr Moinuddin Ahmed of St Joseph's four students, Talita Chowdhury from DIT, Javed Ahmed from St. Josephs, Junaid Ziauddin and Golam Chowdhury himself (both from Scholastica), prepared to attend the function that represented a total of 21 countries. Based on the exceptional skills of each and every one of the 4 students, Bangladesh was given fourth place, a source of pride to the students, the schools and moreover the country they collectively represented. Since then Golam Chowdhury has continued to display his talents. Last year he was invited to attend Harvard University's Harvard Model Congress USA where he received the Certificate For Exemplary Performance.

In 1992, the teachers and administrators of Scholastica presented an extensive range of extra curricular activities and the drama team has undoubtedly been the most successful addition. Initiated by Ms Yasmeen Murshed and directed by Sarah Zaker an elaborate production of "Tasher Desh" was staged in the Dhaka National Museum Auditorium, showcasing the musical, acting and dancing talents of Scholastica's students.

In 1994, with the directorial contribution of Farhan Nadeem, Scholastica staged it's second play entitled 'Amadeus'. With Maher Murshed's aggressive portrayal of Salieri, and Farshed Mahmud's comical rendition of Mozart, the play surpassed the standards of the traditional school productions and, for that matter, surpassed everyone's expectations.

According to a student I recently spoke to, Dhanmondi Tutorials began focusing on the importance of ECA towards 1994. Their efforts have seen students, or rather athletes, excel in the field of sports, particularly cricket. Aside from winning countless tournaments under the leadership of their captain Imran, Dhanmondi Tutorial's inclusion of sports in their ECA program consists of table tennis, football and chess. Their participation of interschool and interclass debates not only promotes the reputation of the school but more importantly allows students to express their individual views on topical issues, and sets them on the road to making sensible and discriminatory judgements. A new organization formed and governed by the students themselves is partially responsible for developing new forms of activities.

However one of their most impressive achievement lies in the field of art. An exhibition held in the Shilpokola Academy will allow students to compete in the field and extend their abilities even further. But the most interesting aspect of their ECA program includes a thorough and comprehensive teaching program emphasizing on the social, geographical and historical aspects of our country.

When I graduated from Sunbeams in 1988, extra curricular programs were virtually unheard of. But through the organizational skills of the school administrators, ECA has become an integral part of the school curriculum. Their program includes a basketball team and an advanced physical training scheme in the field of athletics. Music classes, under the guidance of Mr Qader, allows students to develop vocal talents and communication skills and a drama club are two of the latest additions. This summer, students are being taken to the BKSP sports camp where they can take part in every athletic activity, from basketball, handball, track and field, gymnastics, cricket, soccer, tennis, volleyball and swimming.

Success in the field of extra curricular activities has everything to do with a child's inherent ability to excel in a particular area. Some of them may very well be unaware of the fact that they poses such abilities. Teachers should take it upon themselves to help students identify their strong points and to nurture their hidden talents, and moreover develop programs that will help them exercise and realize their potential. Only then can the words "learning" and "teaching" be taken in their broadest sense.

When it came to writing about the Scholastica Cricket Team, I entailed the help of Mahtab Haider. In his brief essay, he attributes the ongoing success of the team to the efforts of his coach, a man he says, deserves more credit than he is willing to admit.

In the next column Mahtab Haider, a prominent member of Scholastica's Cricket team provides his opinions on the team

"The Scholastica Cricket Team"

by Mahtab Haider

THE Team :
1. Shaker Chowdhury
2. Yasser Arif (Wicket-keeper)
3. Ridwan Hasan
4. Junaid Rahman (Captain)
5. Rubaiyat Jamil
6. Nayem Ahmed
7. Tasabbur Hasan
8. Rayan Islam
9. Jawad Md. Imran Khan
10. B N Rahim
11. Shafin Hussein
12. Naveed Ahmed
13. Farian Yusuf
14. Tanzim Ahmed

A famous saying goes "If you want to touch the sky, you better learn how to kneel." The members of the Scholastica Cricket Team, and I mean all the members, have done their kneeling and it is now time that they rose up and touched the sky. Unmistakably, they have done exactly that. From a not so distant past when they were making humiliating exits in the preliminary rounds of the Nirman School Tournament, they have persevered and the proof of that is that they have emerged the Champions this year in not only the Zonal leg of the tourney but also the rather prestigious Inter-District Championship. The amount of effort that has been put into this achievement cannot be underestimated, as cliched as this may sound, the players, the extras, the budding youngsters (soon to be the lifeblood of the team) have attended practice, day in and day out to earn the glory that they have earned.

Off-season practice, which was a fitness-intensive one, was attended with a zeal that is becoming of these young energetic players. Our coach, Mr. Imran Sarwar (a man who always deserves more credit than he will admit) has been responsible for most of what the team has achieved until now. The scores of days come to mind when it had started raining during practice and Sir (that's what we called our coach) would take us to the adjoining field and we would have relay races, or one of the whole assortment of fitness games that Sir had learned during his training in Worcestershire. I remember one particular day when Sir suddenly suggested that we play what is commonly known as "Bombasting". We were extremely excited at the prospect of playing this game instead of jogging our regular rounds around the field because all of us were quite certain that the former would be far less strenuous. This was not however what I thought of the game after we had played it for about half an hour. I had gotten hit by the tennis ball (at full force) about half a dozen times and I had my back to show for it, which was as red as a baby's bottom (courtesy of Tasabbur Hasan). This was the lighter side of the whole affair. The bottomline was that Sir had made us do some intense fitness for about half an hour and we had agreed quite willingly. So when I compare the type of training that we have had and then compare it with the methods employed by some of the other coaches that I have seen and trained under, I feel (and I speak for the team) that we are very lucky that we have had the opportunity to receive the guidance of one of the most innovative and understanding coaches in our country right now.

There are a few other members of the team that I feel deserve a lot more credit than they have received this season. Our little prodigies — Riyadh, Saniul, Israfil, and Rafiqul. We hope to bring you better cricket and greater glory in the years to come. Thanks.