

State of Education

Imagination is more important than knowledge
— Albert Einstein

Enabling the Disabled

by Syed Imtiaz Ahmed

Observations on the Curriculum for the Mentally Handicapped

Question may arise as to how far a curriculum for teaching a 'disabled' person can actually contribute towards changing the social position of the person and whether the modern rationality based outlook of the society can really accept such a person as an active part of the society. These questions are important since the answers may indicate the ultimate measure of success for any curriculum in this regard.

THE mentally disabled people are now widely recognized world wide as being 'differently able'. Such a definition on the one hand, recognizes their ability and on the other, denotes their difference from the 'normal' human beings as well. The development of curriculum for teaching and training of the mentally disabled people is to a large extent based on this understanding of disability.

In Bangladesh, the training and teaching method for physically handicapped (blind, deaf or dumb people) and the mentally retarded ones is specified as Special Teaching. However, there is no officially recognized curriculum pattern for the mentally disabled persons in our country, while for those who are blind, deaf or dumb special methods like the Braille System or Sign Language are used to teach them according to the conventional education curriculum.

For the mentally disabled people, several non-governmental level initiatives have been taken for their education and training. The curriculum structures differ significantly from the usual ones. However, the curriculum follows the normal basic learning process and rests upon the ultimate target of accommodating such persons within the current social setting. And this social setting definitely endorses reason and rationality as the basic premise of the social as well as community level behaviour of and interaction between the human beings. Indeed, it is this social structure based on the rational behaviour of the modern man that depicts the specific characteristics of the mentally retarded persons and differentiates them from the normal persons. Question may arise as to how far a curriculum for teaching a 'disabled' person can actually contribute towards changing the social position of the person and whether the modern rationality based outlook of the society can really accept such a person as an active part of the society. These questions are important since the answers may indicate the ultimate measure of success for any curriculum in this regard.

In order to learn about the existing curriculum structures for the mentally handicapped people, I went to the Society for Care and Education of the Mentally Retarded, Bangladesh (SCMRB). Moytri Chowdhury and Halima Banu Shelly, both coordinators of the Special Education and Training Section, SCMRB, provided detailed information about the curriculum that they follow in their teaching section. From their information and personal assessment some interesting aspects of the curriculum structure came out.

Curriculum for the Mentally Disabled-A Case Study

The curriculum that the SCMRB follows is essentially a functional one directed towards addressing the present and future requirements of the students. It follows the international definition of a mentally disabled person provided by the American Association on Mental Deficiency and modified by the World Health Organization.

Assessing the ability and tendency of a student and designing the possible special treatments required accordingly is a fundamental element of the curriculum pattern. Also, the state of family resources of a student and the outlook and expectations of the family is also keenly assessed. These assessments however, mark a significant departure of such curriculum from the usual ones. As Moytri Chowdhury pointed out, the curriculum is more focused on the individual student rather than generalizing, though the basic learning methods for the students remain more or less the same. To be more explicit, the retarded students are given educational fundamentals through different techniques, which are essentially based on their individual type of disability.

However, the curriculum structure not only concerns conventional education but also incorporates special vocational training and shelter workshop, which are mainly for the rehabilitation of the students in the social setting. Broadly, the levels of education are divided as a) Pre-Preparatory, b) Preparatory, c) Vocational Training and d) Shelter Workshop. In the pre-preparatory level retarded children belonging to the age group of 0-5 are admitted. One significant aspect of this level is that it draws in the parents, specially, the mother of the retarded child in the education scheme and attempts to train them up about the special care and treatment the child requires. In the preparatory level, a major focus is on normal academic training of students. Usually, the age group for this level is 5-10 though admission or promotion mainly depends on the ability of a particular student. Another important aspect of this level is the stress on the development of social communication and self-help skills. Endeavour to develop such skills among the handicapped students continues in the higher levels as well. In the next level the questions of the students' ability and the condition of the families turn out to be much important considerations. These considerations actually frame the type of training that a student is to receive. Shelter Workshop is mainly concerned with the rehabilitation of these students by providing them work opportunities which, practically is related with different projects of the organization.

The methodology of the curriculum makes its characteristics more explicit. This methodology mainly concerns three inter-related components:

- Graduated Guidance Teaching Strategy (GGTS).
- Integrated Teaching Method/Unit Method.

a) Task Analysis
Task analysis mainly implies specifying some period based tasks, to be realized for the teaching and training of an individual retarded student. In other words, the ultimate task is divided into small specific tasks regarding the teaching and training of the students. As usual, assessment of individual ability and interest area of a student and the condition of his/her family, shapes the basic

of such tasks analyzed.

b) Graduated Guidance Teaching Strategy

To actively assist the students in their learning, the teachers provide their guidance in a graduated manner that involves various stages of assistance. Actually this graduated guidance is provided at all levels and phases of educating the disabled persons. Different stages of graduated guidance involve:

- Full Physical Help;
- Partial Physical Help;
- Shadowing Help; and
- No Help.

These stages clearly indicate that, the guidance of teachers in case of the mentally retarded students essentially contains the provision of gradually phasing out the requirement of help, specifically physical help for them. In fact, the stage of shadow help is fundamentally directed towards boosting the confidence of an individual student about his/her abilities. The entire scheme of guidance thus helps realizing the objective of developing self-help capabilities of the student.

c) Integrated Teaching Method

The major objective of such method is to introduce a student to a variety of skills and ideas by teaching only one subject matter. For example, while teaching a disabled student how to wear shirts, relevant ideas like why wearing shirts is necessary can also be taught. The method explores how many ideas can be related to one subject matter and graduated guidance is provided in its implementation.

Moreover the implementation of the curriculum also involves short term and long term evaluation. The performance and response of each student is evaluated in every 7-10 days and after every six months an overall evaluation report is prepared. The reports determine the future course of educating the students and the par-

ents are given advice regarding the requirements of their children.

Side by side with teaching, training and rehabilitation schemes the SCMRB also provide speech therapy, physiotherapy and clinical therapy for its students.

Home Based Programme: Involving the Community

To successfully implement the ultimate objective of social

rehabilitation of the disabled persons the SCMRB has also undertaken a programme for raising consciousness among the communities about the necessity of sympathy and humane behaviour toward them. One of the ideas is to integrate the disabled persons in the main stream society by facilitating their participation in the normal social, cultural and political activities. In one sense, this programme may be viewed as a part of the curriculum since

it involves a great deal of learning and understanding on part of the communities.

The Rational Premise and the Dehumanization of the Mentally Disabled Persons

SCMRB and other organizations of the like are indeed performing a very important task by taking up the responsibility of teaching, training and rehabilitating the disabled students. The curriculum I discussed perhaps indicates the different components and ideas such a curriculum includes. But to measure the ultimate success of the curriculum based learning, one has to consider how far the trained persons can actually integrate with the mainstream society. Moytri Chowdhury pointed out, after being taught and trained most of their students are provided employment in different projects of SCMRB or other organizations of the like. Also many of them get involved with their family business or profession. They rarely have access to dignified and remunerative open market jobs. The prevailing attitude in the society is that these persons are at best capable of performing some marginal vocational jobs. In fact, the curriculum I studied also put major emphasis on vocational training of the students. But according to Moytri Chowdhury, the people labeled as 'disabled' possess certain qualifications that are becoming rare among the 'ables' of the society. First of all, almost all of them are fully honest as they lack the required 'ingenuity' for being dishonest. A disqualification indeed! More over they are very precise and attentive in the task they perform, since when they learn one subject matter their attention is never diverted or diverted though they may take more time than usual to grasp it properly. But in the societal structure where the hard professionalism and ability to



The disabled need appropriate education.

— Star photo

Remaking Education in South Asia

Making a South Asian University

by Imtiaz Ahmed

The idea is to create a South Asian mind, which would look into the businesses of organizing cooperation in diverse fields within South Asia, and that again, not from the standpoint of nation and national states but from the standpoint of people. The students and researchers here will be people of South Asia, their field of research free from the limitations imposed by the structures of modern nation-states.

ever, does not end there. The very reproduction of colonized institutions and minds had set the education policy of post-colonial South Asia on a course of irrelevance, having very little to do with the requirements of the state, particularly the kind of development the people would like to have. In organizing and reproducing such a state in education, the curriculum plays a far more critical role than it is commonly acknowledged.

Curriculum and the Developmentality of the State

The curricula of the South Asian schools, colleges and universities are thoroughly informed by Western visions and experiences. Such a replication has led to several unpleasant developments in South Asia. To begin with, there is an intrinsic relationship between the organization of the state and the organization of the curriculum, a relationship that is precisely identified by the term, **national curriculum**. The latter, while reproducing the model of development suited to the hegemonic forces, tends to make the citizens 'nationalist' with its implied biasness towards the majority community. Such a development has critical implications in the organization and reproduction of both intra-state and inter-state animosities.

For instance, the governments of both India and Bangladesh are involved not merely in the development of the public school system but also in organizing the **content of knowledge**. Such governmentization of knowledge, however, not only limits competition and creativity, which otherwise could be found in autonomous and independent schooling, but also caters to the populism of the majority community bent on organizing the developmentality of the state that has been referred to earlier. While the former undermines the quality of education, the latter invites dissent from amongst the minority communities. If the second issue creates conditions for civil and inter-state conflicts (between majority and minority communities, on the one hand, and between the states of India and Bangladesh, on the other), leading to the militarization of the societies, the first issue, I believe, remains an obstacle to

the nurturing of innovative ideas towards resolving such conflicts.

Moreover, in South Asia, the curriculum, with its profound, often blind, fancy for 'modern science', is beset with the problem of championing a mode of (economic) development, quite unsuitable to the environment of ours.

In fact, the organization of modern science and the use made of it in the development of the economy lead to a certain paradox having critical extra-territorial consequences. In the case of Farakka and Kaptai Dams, for example, the citizens of both India and Bangladesh, when tutored about the merits of their respective Dams, find themselves being fed with strong scientific and technological reasonings, including the very reasoning of progress and modern development. But such reasonings end at their respective borders, for the governments of India and Bangladesh take a moral position, and this time thoroughly devoid of any scientific and technical reasonings, when referring to the consequences brought about by the Dam of the other. Bangladeshis, having to live with an alarmingly low level of water in the rivers during winter seasons, are time and again reminded of all the ill-effects of the Farakka Dam, while the Indians, having to share the burden of settling more than 50,000 Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, blame the Kaptai Dam for the refugee flow. None, however, dare blame the development of Dams within their respective borders! In this case, modern education has not only caused maldevelopment but also, and more critically, an intellectual blindness towards the state and its development. In the process, however, those who never had an education more easily become victims and suffer!

Towards Reproducing Cooperative Minds

For all purpose, the modern mind in South Asia has become uncooperative and conflictual, what we need is an education that can produce 'cooperative minds' in large numbers. Set to reproduce the power of nations and nationalities, modern education in South Asia (and, I would argue, elsewhere as well) tends to reproduce violence and conflicts, even considering them accept-

able so long as they are directed against alien cultures, communities or countries. As stated earlier, much of the problem, apart from literacy, lies with the kind of education that we have been providing to our children in schools, colleges and universities. In fact, the citizens of South Asia are literally brought up as 'nationalist' or 'communist', tutored to fall in love with the nation that they have come to share more as a result of parental blessing.

Making the people literate is, of course, the first step. But literacy alone will not guarantee the production of 'cooperative minds'. Modern but 'fragmented' Sri Lanka, with high literacy rate, is a good example. What is required is a thorough and an innovative remaking of our education. This must take place at both national and regional levels. Nationally, the organization and reproduction of 'national curriculum' must be abandoned and in its place a curriculum of the people must be so designed as to perform the newer task of cooperation. This is a tedious job and requires attention even to the minutest of the details. Let me give you an example. I will limit my case to Bangladesh's education, particularly relating to the study of history.

History text-books in Bangladesh today glorifies only the heroes and heroines of the Bangalee nation. The heroes and heroines of the Hill people have no place in this history. This creates a sense of alienation among the Hill people for they can not identify themselves with the history of the state of which they are members. This necessarily leads them to search for their 'own history' in this context, a reevaluation of the etymology of history is required. Indeed, the text-books, if they are to be used, must narrate the history of all the people, where all the members will find their worth as human beings, and not be evaluated simply by the (Western) abstraction of nation and nationalities. Such a task of innovatively rewriting history is paramountly important for all the South Asian states, given the fact that the experience of the latter with nation and nationalities is no less tragic than that of Bangladesh. But this is only one aspect of the

sustain cut-throat competition are looked upon as ultimate qualifications for having access to employment opportunities, the future of the taught and trained disabled persons with little or no family assistance is indeed turning bleak and thus questioning the merit of the curriculum.

Another vital question regarding the success of curriculum is to see whether the teaching and training are really changing their social position. It is quite evident that the people of our society are far from recognizing the equal social position of the mentally disabled persons. Rather, often these people are teased and harassed by others. The prevailing tendency in the society is to compartmentalize the disabled people and treat them either with special or extra care or ridicule them for their 'disability'. In fact, in one sense, the idea of involving components like vocational training and shelter workshops for them conforms to the prevailing social approach of compartmentalization. In actual terms little difference lies between the conventional and special curriculums for the disabled persons since, both are essentially the products of a modern reason and rationality based social outlook. Thus, in terms of actually integrating the mentally handicapped people with the mainstream reality perhaps requires a little bit more than trying for their betterment.

However, it is the curriculum formation process where rethinking of the prevailing rationales can have significant impact upon the ultimate target of truly enabling the disabled. It will require rigorous intellectual effort to find out alternatives to the present structure and ensuring its acceptance within social norms. The task will not merely involve some sort of curriculum formation rather, there may have to be a complete deconstruction of the existing rationalist discourse which is primarily based on the philosophical traditions, products of the European enlightenment. Some critics have termed this task as breaking the 'prison house of reason'.

Though the proposition may seem utopian and more a subject of intellectual debates, the need of an alternative curriculum that will integrate the disabled per-

sons in real terms, actually needs proper intellectual efforts in this direction. Or else, the disabled persons can at best be able to survive depending upon generosity and sympathetic behaviour of the 'normal' people.

Betterment Within the Present Realities

As the possibilities of intellectual rethinking in terms of reason and rationality seems distant, some more 'realistic' suggestions may be cited for improvement of the curriculum structure and thus trying for the betterment of their social standing and also to reduce the uncertainties over their future occupation.

Moytri Chowdhury identified that the curriculum structures should address newer areas of job opportunities that may be suitable for the disabled persons and develop training facilities accordingly. As an example, she cited the business of husking rice, where if proper training is given, a disabled person can earn his/her livelihood independently. Moreover, she stressed the importance of including a plan for popularizing the skills, expertise and qualities of the disabled students in the curriculum. Secondly, some may feel that there is a need of an officially recognized standard curriculum for all the schools and training institutions. The lack of such a curriculum is hampering a co-ordinated approach toward the social rehabilitation of the disabled. However, a government project in this regard is reportedly under way. Thirdly, little attention is given to this issue of curriculum by those involved in mainstream educational development. The institutes involved with educating the disabled may arrange frequent seminars and workshops to draw in leading education specialists, academicians and researchers and thus try to acquire creative inputs from them in terms of further improvement of the current curriculum structure. Also, the leading research institutions of the country may arrange programmes to evaluate the curriculum structures and assess whether the present structures need any addition or improvement.

The author is Fellow, Centre for Alternatives

SAARC and whatever that is now flowing from it.

Indeed, towards meeting this end, and in the hope of remaking education in the region, a **South Asian University**, with issue-based faculties spread throughout the region, is being proposed here. The idea is to create a South Asian mind, which would look into the businesses of organizing cooperation in diverse fields within South Asia, and that again, not from the standpoint of nation and national states but from the standpoint of people. The students and researchers here will be people of South Asia, their field of research free from the limitations imposed by the structures of modern nation-states. Let me at this stage dwell upon the process as to how we intend to accomplish, what is otherwise, a colossal task.

At the preliminary stage, the task will be to create 'resource-persons' or faculty members. At a later stage, preferably in two years time, the latter will provide courses and training to the prospective students and researchers attending the University. Such 'resource-persons' will also be involved in the task of organizing the curriculum, one which would be relevant to the people and places of South Asia. The University will have a collegiate structure, that is, faculties will be spread throughout the region; for example, one in Nepal, two in Pakistan, one in Bangladesh, one in Sri Lanka, two in India, and so on. As indicated above, such faculties will be issued based, such as **Water and Resource Management, Peace Studies, Poverty Alleviation, Communication, Gender Politics**, and still others. The list (I believe) will increase with time and with the complexities of the region. At the moment, the plan is to begin with one or two faculties, where scholars and researchers from seven South Asian countries, and of diverse disciplines, will work together on a common course of action. The task is, no doubt, immense, but so is our desire for change. Needless to say, only time will say if our dreams and efforts were timely!

The author teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka.

What Our Children Need to Know

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visits will be at two levels. Material and method: Cross-border field work and community group discussions.

Level one: Within Bangladesh to identify who 'owns' water in a given area/village.

Level two: Cross-country study tour to visit the areas to see for themselves how the rivers are divided. Visits should include Nepal, India and Bangladesh (upper and lower riparian). Students will share their findings with their counterparts in the region in workshop during visits.

At both levels students must hold discussions with community members and analyze the information following a guideline provided.

C. Water management and equity

C.1 How is water organized, managed and preserved; who does it?

C.2 Water and community management: people's participation

C.3 Women as water managers in the family: gender division of water chores, men's role

C.4 Innovative approaches in water management and preservation: experience from the region

Part C: This section will introduce the students to NGOs and innovative local organizations working with new ideas in community water management, women's participation and people centered development.

Material and method: This will include visits to national and regional NGOs in the sector where various methods of water preservation and management are being tried out, specially in Nepal, India and Bangladesh. Women's participation in water management and maintenance can also be seen and experi-

enced.

D. Living with floods and cyclones

D.1 The major events of the last 30 years: 1970-71, 1991, 1998; comprehension of the lessons from floods both in terms of the internal reality and in terms of international reality (politics).

D.2 Preparedness and management of floods as and when it happens.

D.3 Flood as a natural, political and economic phenomenon.

D.4 Sensitize young citizens to specific problems arising out of use and abuse of water; the major problems of internal water pollution.

D.5 The saga of man's dependence on rivers of this country.

Part D: This part will provide basic lessons learnt from the floods and cyclones with special reference to Flood 1998.

Method and material: Lecture, documentary films, literature and group work/discussion will be used to sensitize the children about flood, cyclones and erosion and the struggle of a people living with water. Extracts from the following may be used:

Novels/film: Titas Ekta Nodir Naam by Odoitya Mollo Barman

Padma Nadir Majhi by Manik Bandyopadhyaya

A Time to Unite, a film on the floods of 1998 production by Masud & Catherine.

Extracts from documentaries on the floods of 1998 used by BTV, BBC and Doordarshan compiled to bring out the regional - even the global nature of the flood will give the right perspective in our search for regional answers to both 'over' and 'under' watering.

The author is Chief Executive, Brotee.

The topic of our Next issue is: **'Political Protest: Search for Alternatives'** to be published on 7 January 1999. Creative suggestions are invited from our esteemed readers. Please send your materials to: Imtiaz Ahmed, Executive Director, Centre For Alternatives, Room No. 431, Lecture Theatre, Arts Building, Dhaka University, Dhaka-1000. Tel: 9661900-19, Ext. 4550; Fax: (8802) 836769; E-mail: imtiaz@bangla.net