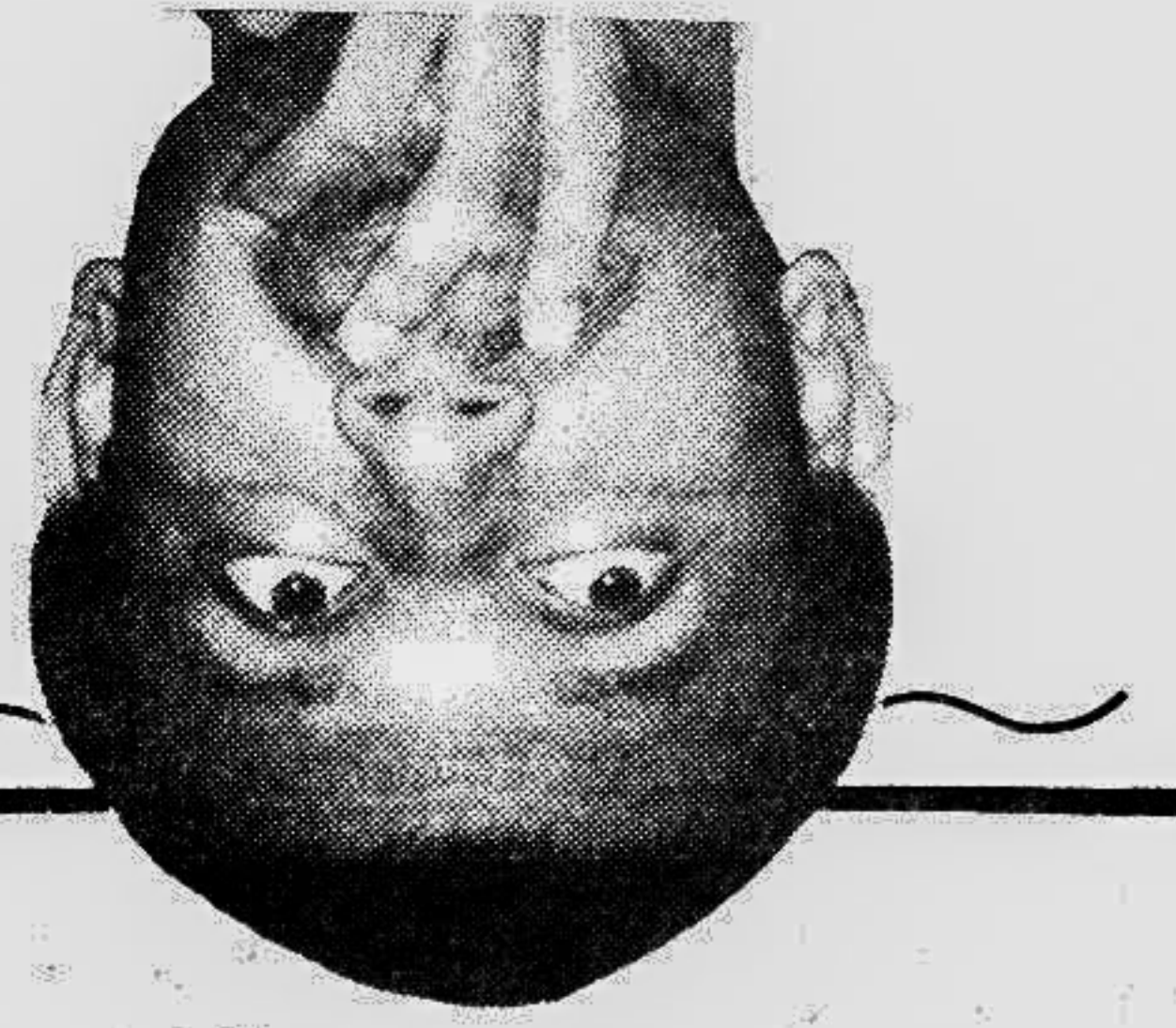


YEP TALK



Good Language Teaching and Good Language Learning



Rod Bolitho with the interviewer

Rod Bolitho is considered to be the **EINSTEIN** of **ELT** (English Language Teaching) who came to Bangladesh in last January to attend an **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE** on National and International Issues in **ELT**. Here he presented the keynote speech on 'Good Language Teaching and Good Language Learning'. He also conducted a workshop on "Language Awareness for Teachers and Learners." Those who have attended his presentations were simply captivated by his depth of knowledge and charm. As for those who missed this opportunity need a little introduction. Rod Bolitho is the director of the Educational Centre of the University College of St Mark & St John, UK. In his career Mr Bolitho has been the director of the innovative **EFL Section** at South Devon College of Arts to Technology and Director of Studies of the Bell School, CAMBRIDGE. He has been Chief Examiner for the **RSA Dip. TEFLA**. He has had nearly 30 years experience as an **ELT** professional with world-wide experience of **ELT** projects. During the conference from **YEP** talk **Ms SYEDA NASRIN AKHTER** had an elaborate discussion with him.

you get teachers who feel completely confident with the English language and from everything that I have heard at this conference there is a real need for improvement of English among the teachers of English. If the teachers themselves don't feel confident in English, how can they possibly deliver the courses to their students and improve their language?

YEP: Do the local teachers who teach English as a foreign language need to go through proper training after their basic course/degrees in universities or can they directly set out to teach?

RB: No, I mean I don't think they can because it seems to me that in a degree-course you concentrate on the subject, you concentrate on the content. So, specially in English they concentrate quite a lot on literature and the only way they are going to become teachers if they also have some kind of post-graduate training in methodology and the basics of teaching. So, they need to understand what education is about. In addition to the basic knowledge of the language they will need the skills of teaching the language. And the skills of teaching a language in a communicative way can not be taken for granted. They have to be trained.

YEP: You mean, they should really be up-to-date.

RB: Yes, and really up-to-date as now we are talking about international perspective, not only within the country. It seems to me that you may need to look at programmes like the ones the Open University is offering, like the Bachelor in **ELT, BELT**. And it seems to me opportunities are beginning to be offered to Bangladeshi teachers. May be more should be known about these opportunities.

YEP: In this conference much has been talked about the regional and the international English. Do you think a compromise is possible between the two?

RB: Sure. What seems important to me is that this regional English is a rich variety of English. This regional English can quite happily co-exist, side by side, with an international version of English. The problem is that, people, the teachers and the students need to know the difference between the regional variety and the international variety. Very common examples were given in one of the workshops here — that in international English we do not use archaic things like *miscreant* or *coitort* or local statistical words like *lakh* & *crore*. These are unknown to the

world outside. If you speak to someone in Britain about the hartal, they simply do not know what it is but here everybody knows what it is. So, the important thing is being able to switch from the regional variety for local communication to the international variety for external communication and the problem I believe at the moment is that many people here are not aware that their language is a regional variety which is not completely intelligible outside Bangladesh.

YEP: You are saying that a compromise is possible, but how?

RB: The compromise is possible if people are aware of the need to switch. For example, you are talking to me now and you have to communicate with me as an Englishman — now, if you use only the regional variety, I will not understand exactly what is because there are so many things in the regional variety which are either out of date or local words. And so, educated people are mostly in a position to make that switch from local to international but I don't think it's true of the population in general. So, in the English classes in schools they need to be made aware of the difference between local and international English. There are plenty of regional varieties of English around the world which co-exists very happily with the international English.

YEP: Would you please comment on the conference we have just attended?

RB: The biggest thing that struck me about the conference is that I have very much valued all of the talks that I had with people in between the sessions. All of the talks were very very nice and I learned a lot from that about the conditions here in Bangladesh — the difficulties that you are facing with English language teaching & in particular I was struck by the energy which people are now prepared to invest into changing things. So, people here at the conference are the converted, so the converted now need to go out & work with the ones who are not converted. If everybody says, "I should do something positive" then they are going to achieve something but if everybody leaves just simply saying "they should," "the govt of Bangladesh should," "somebody else should" — then they don't take responsibility.

YEP: Do you have any suggestions for the young teachers?

RB: Well, the young teachers are the future of English language teaching & I think what's really important for all of the young teachers is to have confidence & belief in what they are doing & never stop learning. Always be a learner because as long as you are a teacher you are also a learner & that applies to the English language teaching but it also applies to education generally. Never believe that you know it all because you never do.

YEP: Any suggestions for the experienced ones?

RB: And for the most experienced teachers, the people who are established in Bangladesh — remember to nurture & look after the next generation because they are the future of English language teaching and the biggest gift that you can give the kids in Bangladeshi schools is to help develop the new generation of teachers who will be the future of Bangladeshi English language teachers.

YEP: Here we have a general belief, a teacher should give and spoonfeed. The teachers have difficulty in convincing guardians and school authorities that a teacher can only provide the environment but it's the students who have to learn & be self-reliant. Would you please say something?

RB: Sure, maybe I can just give you some confusion wisdom here.

The Chinese philosopher once said, "If I find a man hungry and give him some bread and I give him some fish — then I feed him for a day but if I teach him how to fish I feed him for a lifetime. The teacher's responsibility is the latter — not the former. That is they have the responsibility to equip the learners with the mentality and the attitude to life which enables them to go on exploring and always to be critical and always to ask questions. So, I think, one of the problems is that the teachers here are trapped (may be) in this "giving" role. You can give but at the sometime you can take as helping people. I don't know, I try to practice what I preach. So, I hope that in my workshops at the conference, for example, I did both things which was giving but also provoking people to think and involving people. So, its the learners who have to think in future — let the teachers help the learners to think. Do not spoonfeed. Spoonfeeding is no use.

YEP: Would you please highlight what kind of provisions you will have for our national curriculum?

Rod Bolitho (RB): What it seems to me at the moment is that it is important, may be for teachers to be able to help learners to become citizens of Bangladesh. So, that means taking responsibility that means the learners must think. So, in the curriculum, what I'd like to see in any society, is, material which provokes the students to think critically and not just simply be parrots. What I'm looking for there is, teachers developing skills to promote critical thinking in the students and I think you can do that in a curriculum and I think you can write an objective for critical thinking in a curriculum.

YEP: Do you think an international perspective is necessary for our curriculum?

RB: The international dimension is very important and again in a national curriculum. I think it is important to take account of the fact that English is an international language and not just a local variety.

YEP: So, what kind of teachers' training we need?

RB: As far as teacher-training generally is concerned it really seems to me that the teacher training must concentrate, in part, on the language-ability of the teachers so that

YEP Forum Chronicle



Post Flood Assistance Programme

MORE than 70% of the total population of Bangladesh were affected fully or partially by the '98 floods. The prolonged flood devastated two third of the whole country, which was unparalleled in living memory.

The Young Entrepreneurs & Professionals Forum took up a pilot scheme with technical collaboration of Mr Mozammel Huq to assist meritorious SSC examinees who were unable to meet the immediate needs of examination fees and tuitions. This is essentially a soft loan disbursed one time. The examinees are expected to return the full amount in five years and the entire fund will be recirculated to other deserving but meritorious students.

Accordingly a five member YEP Forum team visited Munshiganj on 29th January, 1999 to disburse the loan. With the personal assistance of local zonal and area managers of Grameen Bank, 26 beneficiary students accompanied with their guardians and teachers were distributed Tk 1,000.00 each at the local Paikpara High School.

In the second phase of the Post Flood Assistance Programme, a seven member YEP Forum team visited Sirajganj on 5th February, 1999. This time also the local general manager head of administration and area manager of Grameen Bank took their personal initiative to assist the programme. In this occasion 28 meritorious students accompanied with their guardians and teachers were given Tk 3,000.00 each for their examination fees and tuitions. Local Latifa Gono-Shikhya Angan in Tarakandi was the venue.

This pilot project was assisted by YEP Forum members and contributions from overseas. The project is designed to be expanded provided the results obtained from two groups are satisfactory. As detailed ground work was done on local areas basis — specially on financial and academic conditions of the beneficiaries, YEP Forum hopes this can be duplicated among other target groups.

Teaching in English Medium Schools

Nasreen K Taher

WHAT do we expect from an English Medium School? We expect the best, says the parents. We expect that our wards will come out as the best among many products and rule the nation someday. One can see that a great deal of responsibility is being shouldered upon a teacher who teaches in such an institution then. But how to take the responsibility of making myself into a perfect teacher? For, it is not that easy to get a response from oneself as it is to make others respond to my wishes. One must be self motivated to achieve success in knowing himself or herself first, and then judge the response in others.

The first thing to think about when you walk into the classroom is the control of the class. A pleasantly yet commanding appearance steals the show. It is no easy to quieten someone who is sharing his feelings with his fellow mates in a very high pitch; chances one, he might even try to involve you in his conversation as well. In such a situation, a good thing to do is to put the work on the board and watch. One or two might still be continuing on their old conversation, but the rest will suddenly become quiet and start work. The thing that works most in a teacher is the quality of patience. A teacher must have the patience of understanding the children's otherwise there will always be a difference of communication between the student and the teacher.

While teaching, the sense of clear conception of the teacher makes a portion of teaching which is very vital. He or she must have various ways of explaining a material to make it understandable, and at the same time enjoyable enough so that they remember what they are reading. Sight seeing tours to different places are very much enjoyable when learning geography. At the same time, visiting the museums while studying History makes it more interesting. Above all, the subject teacher here must have a sound knowledge of his or her chosen area.

A teacher should possess the qualities of being a good elderly family member too, who takes the responsibility of a big family with 30 or 40 children. She is the mother of them all at least that is what should be in her mind. Since every child is not of the same temperament, therefore she has to deal with them in different manners. Some of the negative capabilities that hinders one from becoming a good teacher are, sudden anger, unwillingness to help the weaker ones, prejudice, and lastly the pride in one's own knowledge.

In the end, we can say that a teacher must possess a sound mind and solemn judgement to be able to go into the hearts of his or her students, for, in an English medium the medium of instruction is not native; it is foreign and to get the best result out of it, both the student and the teacher has to work together. Only then, the best results can be expected.

Meet the Young Teachers

YEP: Most people abandon teaching to build up their career in other fields. Whereas you have turned down a BCS job for teaching. Isn't strange?

Fatima Rahman: Well, I joined teaching rather accidentally. Out of curiosity I applied for a job in Vigarunnisa Noon School and College and by the strange whim of fate I was selected for the job. The rest is history with which I wouldn't bore you. Once a person starts enjoying his/her work then it just gets into the blood and this also happened to me. So, I couldn't leave it.

YEP: What was your first experience with teaching?

FR: When I joined Vigarunnisa Noon School in 1995 they had just opened their SSC (English Medium) and I was the only English teacher for that. My MA exam. was going on in full swing. There was a lot of confusion all around but with the generous help of all the teachers, specially Mrs Hamida Ali's guidance, I was able to pull through. Besides, I am a bit natural in handling kids — this also helped. It is amazing that my MA result was better than that of my BA (Hons).

YEP: What difficulties you have to face as a teacher? Do you still enjoy it?

FR: There'll always be professional hazards to pull one back and it's unwise to contemplate on them. Teachers in general feel that there are some guardians who spoon-feed their kids and some can't even find the time to check if the ward is regular in his studies. I'll request the first group to trust the ability of their children and let them be self-dependent. As for the second group, I'll simply ask if half an hour a day is too much to invest into their children's future? As far enjoying the work, I would have quit it for something else if I didn't.

YEP: You have left a very famous school for a relatively unknown one. There must be a very good reason behind it. What's that?

FR: I've been asked this question once too often and hope this is for the last time I'm answering it. I've enjoyed teaching there for some time and learnt a lot. But, I gradually felt like getting into a rut in teaching English according to the SSC syllabus. I really felt frustrated to think that there was no scope for positive changes. Besides, it systematically stifles the creative faculties of both teachers and students. The O'level syllabus surely holds special charms for a person who has to read the same essay on the same old topic year after year in hundreds of copies. So, when BAF SEMS offered me this job I was rather delighted. Looking back after one year I congratulate myself for being bold enough to take this step. It was an honour to work there but I am rather proud to work in BAF SEMS where both teachers and students pursue excellence according to the international standard. The advanced and effective methods of teaching which I've learnt through BELT (Bachelor in English Language Teaching) could not be properly implemented in a typical school whereas in BAF SEMS most of the teachers and the Principal herself are foreign trained who encourage me to adapt modern methods. I think this is a great incentive. What to do with fame when one derives no joy from the work one does?

YEP: What are the basic differences existing between the O'level syllabus and the SSC syllabus in both Bengali and English medium?



FR: I'm sure that you know that the O'level exam is conducted by the London University which maintains international standard. SSC in English medium teaches all the subjects in English except the two compulsory Bengali papers. Apparently these are equivalent but in reality a gulf of difference exists between the skills they each promote. The O'level syllabus covers both the basic and the up-to-date knowledge. It is more open ended and demanding to ensure the international standard.

YEP: That means you consider the O'level syllabus to be perfect?

FR: Well there is always scope for improvement. The O'level system is good but it can be made better with the introduction of some new things. Like, now a student can appear in any number of subjects as many times as he likes. This excessive freedom is rather harmful for students as it makes them idle. So, like the SSC exam the students of the O'level should be made to appear in 6 to 10 papers at one sitting. Like the GCSE system group discussions and aural exams should be included in English. These would surely help O'level students upgrade their standard. In other countries IGCSE is gradually being introduced and it may soon come to Bangladesh, I hope.

YEP: Describe yourself as a teacher.

FR: In the book *Teachers* Frank E Hugget has said, "A lot of teachers see their work as a vocation, but I could never feel that. In some ways, I see myself as a performer, an entertainer, setting up activities for the children at their level. If they enjoy them, then the job is done." I feel the same.