

Where have all the English

BELTA Revisited

RAZIA SULTANA KHAN

THERE was a hush of expectation broken every now and then by a muted comment and a snippet of conversation from the assembly of people gathered in the auditorium of the British Council

on Thursday, July 15, 2004. They were an assorted group of people from all parts of Bangladesh linked by a common profession, similar aims and a variety of ideas. For many there was the euphoria of being part of a conference for the first time.

Home for the summer vacation I was told that BELTA (Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association) had been revived after almost two decades and was organising a conference on July 16 and 17. In the middle of summer inertia I decided it was easier to refuse when asked to present a paper for the conference, especially since I had the excuse, "it's too short a notice." I wasn't allowed to cop-out though, and Arifa Rahman (President, BELTA) told me, (no requests this time), that she had put my name down as the moderator for one of the sessions. Arifa Rahman and I go back a long way and having been a student of hers at a TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) course way back in the mid '80's, "No" was not an option. My session was on day 2 but having been roped in I decided to turn up the first day in the hope of meeting old friends and acquaintances.

I listened to the discussants and the presenter on the podium but part of me was busy drinking in the atmosphere of the conference. Admittedly the auditorium was not as full as one would have expected but what it lacked in physical strength was more than made up by the excitement.

During the morning tea break I placed myself strategically near the doors of the auditorium. I wasn't disappointed. Screams of "Razia!" "Apa!" "Madam!" and warm hugs, depending on whether the person was a friend, a junior colleague or an ex-student. Others came up to me and reminded me of the BELTA conference the first time around. There was no way I could forget that. It was the early 80s and I



FORUM ON ELT AND TEACHING DEVELOPMENT: (from left) Dr Mobasherra Khanum, Dr Arifa Rahman, Karim of Karim International, Razia Sultana Khan (Moderator), Suraiya Huda and Kishwar Kamal.

was out teaching for the first time. Still not certain whether I wanted to take up teaching as a profession, I had let myself be seduced, more by vacant teaching posts than any strong commitment. BELTA was in its heyday and the then executive members, Abdus Selim and Hamidur Rahman had wanted me to take a more active part. New to the profession and very insecure, I had shied away with the easy promise of "the next time." I had however listened attentively to all the papers presented and it had been my first exposure to a conference.

Twenty years later from the vantage point of experience and countless conferences under my belt, I looked around at the young eager faces, and felt their excitement. It wasn't just BELTA I was revisiting, it was part of my youth.

Twenty years later from the vantage point of experience and countless conferences under my belt, I looked around at the young eager faces, and felt their excitement. It wasn't just BELTA I was revisiting, it was part of my youth.

I realised how far I had come when, at the absence of a speaker, I needed little persuasion to face a session and give an extempore presentation on "Preparing an Effective Lesson Plan." The strategies learned in the last 20 years came to my aid and feeling a rush of adrenaline, I was able to provide my bit to keep the wheels of the conference turning. Teachers need to be improvisers and be ready for all eventualities. Who has not faced at least one of the following situations? You're