

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

Report of the Primary School Project
in Comilla Kotwali Thana.

January 1962 through June 1963.

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REPORT OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL PROJECT
IN COMILLA KOTWALI THANA
January 1962 through June 1963

A change in the system of education has repeatedly been recommended by education committees and commissions, but almost no serious attempt has been made to experiment with new ideas in education. Though primary education has been free for 35 years, it cannot be said that education has made great headway. A sample survey in one school unit revealed that among a population of slightly over 3000 there was one graduate, one who passed the intermediate, 12 matriculates and 156 who passed Class V. A similar situation might be found in many other places. The effects of education are not very much felt in the villages.

Education tends to be unrelated to village life. Students do not acquire in school any competency in rural occupations such as agriculture and animal husbandry, and they come to dislike the parental occupations. They become more urban-minded, and want a white collar job, however insignificant. Many do not even want to live in the village. Those who drop out of school may even become liabilities to their local community, unwilling to contribute their services in the traditional occupations, yet not fitted for work elsewhere. Those who remain in school longer, having received no training in how to earn a living, have an insufficient and bookish education and are not well equipped to face life's problems.

Proposed Pilot Project in the Primary Schools
of the Comilla Kotwali Thana

In an attempt to devise a more useful type of education for rural children and youth, a plan for a Pilot School Project was prepared in December 1961 by the Academy for Rural Development, Comilla, and submitted to the Department of Education. The plan proposed to begin the project with 20 out of the 59 primary schools in the thana and to add 10 more schools every six months until all 59 schools would be included

In the pilot schools, the main objectives would be:

Reorganization of primary schools and introduction of extension education;

Development of a curriculum centering around rural occupations to pave the way for economic foundation of education;

Organization of Sabuj Sanga (Youth Clubs) for promoting practical work projects and for leadership training; and

Making the schools centres of community education for adults as well as children.

The plan included a request to the Department of Education for four officers to be deputed, of the following categories:

Thana Education Officer (for the total project)

Assistant to the Thana Education Officer

An Officer for children and youth activities

An Officer for Adult Education.

The Department deputed to the Academy the Thana Education Officer and his Assistant, on a part-time basis (they also work part time in the office of the District Education Officer).

The staff available for the project consisted of the two Officers mentioned, the Academy's Instructor in Education, a Demonstrator for Youth Clubs, one Peace Corps Volunteer full time and another part time (for the school lunch programme). From December 1962 to April 1963 a temporary member of the Academy staff also assisted part time in the education project.

Selection of Primary Schools

In January 1962 the first twenty schools were chosen from villages having co-operative Societies. Some were "model schools" and some were not. The preference given to co-operative villages was based on the belief that since those villages were trying to improve their economic lot and had already accepted some new ideas, they might participate more readily in new methods of education.

Ten more schools were taken in July 1962 and ten more in January 1963. Thus the total number stood at 40 in June, 1963. It is planned to include the remaining 19 primary schools in July 1963.

Guidelines

The guidelines suggested to the teachers of the Pilot Aschools were:

General improvement of the schools as to instruction, enrolment, regularity of attendance and punctuality;

- Organization of Sabuj Sanga for children's leadership training, character building, creative work and social

service through projects at home and school, with arrangements for periodic exhibitions of their work;

For business training, the opening of co-operative stores in the schools by the boys and girls, using their own capital;

Starting libraries in each school, with selected books especially suitable for children and some appropriate for newly literate adults;

Establishment of closer relations between school and home by organizing parent-teacher associations;

Formation of small museums with different kinds of soils, fertilizers, manures, local agricultural products, clay models;

Arrangements for games and sports and recreational and cultural activities for the total development of the child;

Making the school a centre of adult education (community education).

Training of Teachers

The Headmasters and assistant teachers of the first 20 pilot schools were initially given a three-day orientation course at the Academy in new concepts of education. After that the Headmasters met regularly twice a month at the Academy. When new schools were added to the project, their Headmasters began to attend the fortnightly meetings. From time to time the assistant teachers also attended the meetings for special project training.

The regular meetings had a very good effect. The teachers shared their experiences, difficulties, and problems, and discussed new ways of solving the problems they identified.

Continuous learning by the teachers is an essential part of the Pilot School Project, for they need to understand the reasons why they should experiment with something new, and they receive ideas and encouragement from one another. The attempt of the Academy to keep the morale of the teachers high by regular meetings was supplemented by a fortnightly education bulletin, "The Village Teacher" published in Bengali for one year.

The Response to the Project

In the implementation of the Pilot Project there was continuous need to make certain that the teachers, the parents, and the children understood and appreciated what was being undertaken by the teachers.

The Teachers

The first problem was with the teachers themselves. During the first two to three months, most of them resisted. The attitude of many was almost hostile. They realized that the age-old custom of teaching in the classroom alone, by talk and chalk, was being challenged. The introduction of extension ideas meant a change in attitude and it meant actual work in and out of the school. Not all the teachers could accept the need to change their methods.

For the teachers to meet with parents, to form clubs and promote co-operative stores and individual and group projects by boys and girls -- all this called for new approaches and new procedures and extra work. Since these additional burdens were without extra remuneration, it is not surprising that it took a while to get the teachers accustomed to working within this new framework.

The Parents

During the first six months, parents and teachers in 13 of the 20 schools met 59 times, or roughly an average of a bi-monthly meeting for each of them. The other 7 schools did not organize such meetings. Parents seemed to think that once they had put their children in school, it was up to the teachers to make them learn what they ought to know. They did not think of the education of their children as a joint responsibility of the teachers and parents. Attendance at the meeting was very thin, ranging from 2 to 20, and this type of meeting was gradually discontinued.

Another approach to the parents was then tried. The teachers visited in the homes of their students and had heart-to-heart talks with the parents about their children's education. The parents began to feel the need to co-operate with the teachers and a better understanding began to emerge.

The Children

From the outset the children were enthusiastic about the Pilot Project. They liked to work on school projects and to take part in outdoor activities. Such things are more natural to their age than the sedentary habits of the traditional classroom.

It was proved beyond doubt that the project activities by children brought new life into them. Attendance in school was more regular and learning in class improved. The percentage of pass increased in each class, and new problems arose such as lack of accommodation and heavier teaching load. Attention had to be given to better use of existing staff and buildings.

The increase in enrolment in the 40 pilot primary schools that had joined the project is shown in the table below.

Enrolment for Three Years by Classes in the 40 Primary Schools participating in the Pilot School Project upto June 1963

<u>Date</u>	<u>Class I</u>	<u>Class II</u>	<u>Class III</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class V</u>	<u>Total</u>
30.6.61	2968	973	745	527	377	5590
30.6.61	3002	1249	836	596	483	6166
30.6.63	3244	1428	977	689	540	6878
Increase, 1963 over 1961	276	455	232	162	163	1288

Sabuj Sanga (Youth Clubs)

Sabuj Sanga (Youth Clubs) are now operating in all the 40 schools presently participating in the project. The total enrolment in the clubs is 1809. Individual projects were undertaken by 1351 members. There are, besides, school projects. Most projects are in agriculture and deal with the banana, pineapple, papaya, and seasonable vegetables. A good number of the members keep poultry, goats or cows.

Sabuj Sanga and project activities got a great impetus in the five primary schools where a Peace Corps Volunteer organized an intensive children's programme, which included training and personal supervision of their activities. The Peace Corpsman in co-operation with one of the Academy personnel gave training in vegetable cultivation and poultry for six days to 443 primary school children, including 93 girls. In addition, 26 boys received one week's training in poultry at the Academy. Seasonal vegetable training was offered to all the Sabuj Sanga members in their schools by a specially trained man, appointed by the Academy. Instruction sheets in simple Bengali were distributed among the members for guidance.

From an economic standpoint, it was gathered from the teachers that a total of Rs. 1610.73 Paise was collected by the children from the sale proceeds of the agricultural products and animal husbandry outputs besides what was consumed by the families of the children.

The School Co-operative Store

In 31 schools the children have set up small stores selling school supplies, sweets, and sometimes cottage industry products. The children operate the stores co-operatively, using their own capital. The school starting with the smallest amount had Rs. 2.50 Paisa and the largest, Rs. 17.50. The total initial capital was Rs. 292.73, and the total capital to date is Rs. 670.57 Paisa.

In 22 schools, the clubs have set up small museums with samples of soils, fertilizers, seeds, insects, and clay models of animals, fruits and farm and household tools, made by the children.

Demonstrations and Local Exhibitions

Only 16 schools had demonstration plots in agriculture, and these were not a success. Most of the plots were destroyed either by stray cattle or by miscreants when the schools were closed.

The individual projects at home were quite successful, as amply demonstrated by exhibitions in each school, and in two Unions where all their primary schools participated competitively and prizes were awarded. In these two Unions, the schools received co-operation and financial help from the local union councils. The home visits of the Peace Corpsman to see

children's projects attracted the attention of the villagers, and boys and girls were greatly encouraged to take up projects as the village people began to feel that something was really happening.

First Annual Youth Rally

The First Annual Rally of the Sabuj Sanga children at the Academy was held in January 1963, along with an exhibition of their agricultural products and handicrafts. About 3000 children assembled under the leadership of their teachers. Buses were hired by the project to transport the children and teachers from agreed-upon points along the highways.

The Rally was addressed by the Director of the Academy, the District Inspector of Schools, and others. A simple lunch of Kitchuri was served to successive groups of participating, but orderly youngsters.

The children had brought their vegetable exhibits transplanted into pots: tomato plants loaded with fruits, enormous beautiful cabbages, other vegetables. Poultry was also exhibited, and sewing and embroidery, braided ornaments and basket work, and many model airplanes made of wood, bamboo and tinfoil. For the best exhibits prizes were awarded -- watering cans, kerosene lanterns, rubber balls, jars of insecticides.

Mr. David Philips, the Peace Corps Volunteer, worked very hard to make the Rally a success. It was probably the first of its kind in the Province and it greatly enthused the teachers and students, and in fact, all who were in attendance.

Current Plans for Projects

Beginning in the Spring of 1963, three seasonal competitions are planned for each year in each school, and training and guidance are offered in the seasonable vegetables. The first competition is being held the last week in June, and prizes totaling Rs. 1000 (from project funds) are being distributed among the competitors for their encouragement.

Library Development

When the Pilot School Project began, only two of the 59 schools of the thana had libraries, and these had only a few books. There is no library allotment for primary schools. In the June 1962 Thana Council meeting, the chairmen of the union councils agreed that the union councils would contribute Rs. 25.00 per annum for each school for the development of libraries. So far, six union councils out of twelve have contributed. Besides this, the teachers set apart for this purpose a portion of the examination fees. New libraries have been started in 37 schools, with 1622 books procured.

To assist in the selection of books, a list of 100 suitable books for children was distributed to the teachers. The list was obtained from the report on the Seminar on Children's Literature held at the Academy in 1961. The report was published in Bengali captioned as 'Our Childrens Literature' and is available as a technical publication of the Academy.

Further to encourage reading, book bags containing two or three books from the Academy Extension Library are loaned out to teachers at the fortnightly meetings, and the teachers and parents are eligible to take books directly from the Academy's Extension Library.

Supervision and Guidance

The 40 pilot schools were each visited on the average five times during the 18 months. There were, during this period, three different Thana Education Officers and two assistants. These frequent changes made it difficult for the Officers to adjust themselves to a new type of supervision. They did not fully understand the implications of the plan, nor could they do justice to the education extension job expected of them.

In such a new enterprise, teachers need constant guidance from seasoned supervisors. They need education officers who will visit the school and look critically at plans and procedures and discuss the work in a sympathetic and helpful way. And they need to attend and conduct seminars for discussing local school problems.

Publications

For one year, autumn 1961 to autumn 1962, a fortnightly educational bulletin was published, as previously mentioned. Its title was "Gayer Sikshaka", - The Village Teacher. Most of the articles were written by teachers. They concerned the work of the teachers, the activities of the children, and topics on adult education. The purpose was to publicize the new approach, especially among the 252 teachers throughout the thana who were regular subscribers.

The children were pleased to find their projects described in print and sometimes read the whole bulletin. The bulletin aroused considerable interest among its readers, but it had to be discontinued for lack of adequate budget provision.

An illustrated Bengali booklet entitled "The Modern Village Teacher" was published in late 1962. It depicted the different roles of the teachers -- at school, in the homes of the parents, and in project activities.

For the Sabuj Sanga members a small handbook was prepared explaining the responsibilities of members and providing simple forms for recording their projects.

The School Lunch Programme

In 13 primary schools, a mid-day tiffin (lunch) was served. This programme began in August 1962. The wheat was supplied by Wheat associates, Inc., and the contingent costs for the preparation of the tiffin were borne by the local schools. Demonstrations in cooking wheat were conducted in the villages by a Peace Corps nurse and other staff members of the Women's programme of the Academy.

The lunch programme has had three benefits:

- (1) additional nutrition for physical growth,
- (2) increased regularity in attendance, and
- (3) increased enrolments.

An attempt was made to keep systematic records of the height and weight of the children in four of the schools to compare their physical development with that of children in schools not receiving the tiffin. The portable scales used, however, were not very accurate and the figures obtained are not reliable.

For next year it is planned to provide tiffin in more of the schools and to equip a few schools with clinical scales and devices for measuring height accurately. The wheat will again be supplied by Wheat Associates, Inc., and the scales, it is hoped, will be provided by another agency.

Evaluation of the Project

The evaluation of this extension education project here presented is based on interviews with the teachers, on the regular supervisory visits, on the exhibitions held and the participation of the local people.

As previously stated, the teachers were at first reluctant to accept new ideas and the extra work involved. They have now changed their attitude and view education from a wider angle. The horizon of their outlook is beginning to extend from book-centered education to life-centered education. This is largely the result of their involvement in project activities and their closer touch with children and parents.

Happily some of the teachers have become so interested that they spend extra hours with the children to help them in their educational activities. Real life is now found in some of the schools.

Parents, too, as already mentioned, could not at first see the benefit of such a programme, especially the direct involvement of the children in agriculture and poultry and cattle projects. The initial mild resistance here and there began to change when the teachers made home visits and talked with the parents about their children's education. The parents are beginning to see that the education of their children is in fact a joint effort.

As for the children, it has been noted that they were enthusiastic about the new type of education. They readily participated in the extension projects, liked to take part in simple demonstrations and revelled in Sabuj Snaga activities. In respect to their traditional classwork, attendance by teachers and children has become more regular, and the percentage of pass from class to class has increased considerably in the Pilot Schools.

The new experiences of the boys and girls in the Pilot Schools also include a closer relationship with their teachers and with congenial atmosphere for the wholesome development of children. The creative side of their life is given a boost, as they now earn a little money from their individual projects and meet sundry expenses of their own. Through these achievements and their school co-operatives, the children develop a sense of confidence in their own ability, and a sense of belonging and of working together.

Suggestions for Undertaking Pilot
Projects in other Thanas

1. The Thana Education Officer and his assistant will need to be oriented in the extension ideas of education, especially in the project approach to children's education. Their role as educators should be to train the teachers in

new concepts through seminars, conferences and meetings, by issuing printed materials and by visiting the schools.

2. The services of the Thana level officers of the Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry may be sought to train the teachers, and the union agriculture assistants may assist in training the children in those subjects. Short courses for the teachers should be arranged at the thana headquarters and for the children in the local schools.

3. There should be regular meetings with the teachers for discussion of educational problems in general and project activities in particular, for finding out solutions from day to day experiences.

4. While on tour, the Thana Education Officer should make night halts and hold conferences with teachers and discuss educational matters, and whenever and wherever possible make home visits to see the children's projects.

5. A children's Sabuj Sanga should be formed in each school. The members must each have an individual project at home, and group projects at school may be taken up where appropriate. The clubs may also run little co-operative stores in the schools to meet sundry demands of the children and to gain experience in co-operative and business management.

6. One of the teachers duly oriented will have charge the Sabuj Sanga organization, another the co-operative store supervision and the third the library development. The school development will be a co-operative effort of all the teachers.

7. At least three to five schools should initially be taken for experiment, and after six months, more schools may be included until gradually all the schools can be covered.

8. A list of possible projects covering all aspects of school life should be prepared. This will cover besides Academic and cultural projects, seasonal vegetables, banana, pineapple and other fruits, and the rearing of cattle and poultry; cottage industries may also be included.

9. Instruction sheets on each kind of agricultural item or other projects should be prepared and thoroughly discussed prior to actual work. They may then be distributed to the children.

10. Seasonal competitions and exhibitions may be arranged and prizes awarded to encourage the children in project activities. This will help boy-mind education and ensure a better educational foundation for them.

11. Frequent home visits by teachers should be a "must" to see the projects and to have talks with parents about the education of their children. The success of the whole undertaking depends on these issues to a great extent.