

The Role of Peer-Learning and Seating Arrangement to Enhance the Quality of Primary Education

Almost everyone, in particular, the teachers generally point out one factor whenever the issue of enhancement of primary education comes under discussion. And that refers to the unacceptable ratio of teachers and students. Compared to any other country, in Bangladesh the number of students is larger and the length of contact hour is shorter.

In the primary schools of our country, the usual length of one class is 40-45 minutes. If we suppose that the average presence of students in the class is around 40 to 50, then the teacher's average attention to one student would be one minute. Then how far would the teacher be able to communicate with a student in just one minute? It's impossible to establish communication with all the students; it's not even possible to make eye contacts with them. As a result, many students remain out of the learning-communication. Naturally, their abilities cannot be assessed nor can their weaknesses be identified. And subsequently no remedial measures can be taken.

Experience says that teachers usually pay more attention to the students who score better in the academic assessment. Teachers ask these students questions inside the class and pronounce words of commendations about them. On the other hand, the students who do not or cannot obtain good marks in the tests, they fail to attract adequate attention of the teachers. As a cumulative result, the better students always score better and the backward or slow learners perpetually fail to cope with the academic demands. Such a recurrence of failure demoralizes the students and ultimately they drop out of the system and get themselves in sundry occupations or professions.

This problem of communication between the students and teachers is never acceptable. One answer to it could be to enact some changes in the seating arrangement within the

classroom. This can help bring in some comprehensive improvement in the academic attainment and quality of learning of the students. Organization of peer learning in combination of advanced and slow learners may become an effective learning strategy which is likely to bring in some remedial measures. Sometimes it has been found that the students feel rather more comfortable to ask a fellow student some questions to have a clear idea of any topic already discussed in the class than to ask the teacher again. So the peer learning method can be one effective strategy for the slow learners to understand something which they had not been capable to catch up during the delivery of the teacher inside the classroom. Besides, the advanced learners can always contribute to the process of learning of the academically backward students.

Now-a-days, in many of the renowned schools, seating plan in the classroom is rearranged every fortnight on the basis of the weekly skills assessment of the students. In order to ensure equal attention to all the students, this method can be usefully implemented in the primary schools. Through a weekly rotation system, every student can have the opportunity in phases, to have a seat in the front benches. A system should be in place so that the slow learners are allowed to sit beside the advanced ones. In the process, the slow learners would also come within the close monitoring of the teachers. This will certainly enhance the quality of learning of the slow learners. As a result, all students can learn better and a comprehensive improvement in the area of primary education can be realized.

Enamul Haq Khan Tapas



Learners of Gondhorajpur Primary School, Amjhupi, Meherpur

Challenges in the Teaching-Learning Methods in Primary Education: Experiences & Views of the Community

The teaching-learning method is the fundamental concern in educational management. An effective teaching-learning method can be a very important and powerful instrument to help develop the latent qualities of the students and to bring in them the expected changes. The achievement of the basic goals of primary education rests on adequate infrastructural development, recruitment of efficient human resources, developing a curriculum suitable to modern times. At the same time, it demands the enhancement of the classroom-centered teaching-learning methods.

Various challenges generally upset the enhancement of the teaching-learning methods in our primary schools. There is a common observation that our curriculum, in particular, the school-based teaching-learning methods are not in proper tune with the needs of the learners in the context of the changes that characterize the modern times. It is possible that there is a dearth in teachers' training or the teachers do not feel adequately motivated to apply the skills learnt through training. If the local education officers and the members of School Managing Committees become conscious and pro-active about this, then the enjoyable and effective teaching-learning methods would be ensured.



Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) is, at present, implementing a project titled Protyasha (Expectations). Under the work-plan of the project, some local 'Community Education Watch Groups' have been formed in different areas of the country. These groups have already organized a number of workshops on 'The Challenges of Teaching-Learning Methods: Our Responsibilities', in which detailed discussions took place to face these school-centered challenges. The representatives of the local schools, the representatives of the associations of teachers and guardians, local education officers, NGO representatives and members of community education watch groups took part in these workshops. The prevailing general opinion is that the improvement of the degree of acquisition of the learners is connected with the improvement of the teaching-learning methods and the environment of the schools. The more important challenges to enhance the quality of the teaching-learning methods as identified by the participants are noted below.

- As the primary schools came under government administration from its earlier community patronage, the effective participation of local people in the matters of the schools has come downward. The local people are not interested in the teaching-learning methods inside the classroom any more. They are not able to create any pressure on the school or the teachers to ensure quality education.

- The Chairman or the members of the School Managing Committees do not supervise whether the teaching-learning methods are being applied properly within the classroom. Most of them do not consider it as their responsibilities. In some cases, they do not have the necessary time, opportunity or abilities to assess the quality of classroom activities.
- Fresh graduates from the Primary Training Institutes are often eager to apply the enjoyable and activity-oriented methods in the classrooms, but the elderly teachers show very little interest in that. The elderly ones consider it as an extra pressure and hence they even discourage those who want to initiate it. After some ineffective interventions, the new graduates lose their enthusiasm too and then follow the conventional methods.
- The schools sometimes suffer from a lack of necessary education materials. On the other hand, often the teachers refrain from putting them to use on the plea of constraints of time, even when there exists a plenty of materials.
- The teachers must prepare a lesson plan before entering a classroom. But the common experience is otherwise. The teachers take part in the classroom activities without any prior preparation.
- The teachers of the schools, the members of SMCs, the guardians and the education officers at district or upazila levels, all consider the result of the terminal certificate examinations as the critical indicator of achievement. So everyone runs after scoring good grades in the terminal examinations. That takes away all the required attention to other factors associated with quality education.
- The classrooms in the schools are usually either lesser in terms of number or inadequate in size. That restricts the application of enjoyable and activity-oriented teaching-learning methods within the classroom in spite of the urge on the part of the teachers. Many of the schools do not have any playground for the students. So it becomes impossible to conduct sports or other extra-curricular activities.
- In spite of some definitive directives, special care is not taken for the slow learners. The teachers often appear to be forgetful that there is an assortment of students in the class, the advanced and backward ones.
- Most of the schools suffer from deficit of teachers. So the existing teachers have to undertake extra load, which also tells on the quality of teaching-learning methods in the classroom.





- ◆ The head teachers of the schools are often engaged with management and administrative matters. That somehow prevents them from regular supervision and monitoring of the teaching-learning methods being applied by the teachers inside the classroom.
- ◆ The man power in the district and upazila education offices at the local level is inadequate in terms of necessity. So the education administration personnel cannot also effectively

contribute to necessary academic supervision and monitoring. The upazila education officers usually do not monitor the classes while the teachers are engaged inside.

- ◆ All the teachers do not possess C-in-Ed or basic training in education. In some cases, many of the teachers underwent basic training quite some years ago. There is little scope to consider the issue of the development of their professional skills as a continuous process.

Facing the challenges of the enhancement of the quality of the methods of teaching-learning as discussed in the workshops is not something absolutely difficult. Overcoming the challenges can look easy if we can ensure: effective participation of the local community in the activities of the primary schools; creation of further opportunities for acquisition of the professional skills of the teachers; improvement in the areas of sincerity and sense of responsibilities of all involved; effective monitoring by the personnel of education administration and improvement of the appropriate monitoring by the School Managing Committees. Above all, everybody is of the opinion that the intensification of community participation and creating a mass awareness in this can make the enhancement of the quality of primary education a reality.

Moshraff Hossain

Amjhupi Gandharajpur Government Primary School

Meherpur is one of the backward districts of Bangladesh in terms of development in the area of primary education. There are 26 primary schools in the Amjhupi Union of Sadar upazila under Meherpur district. However, Amjhupi Gandharajpur Government Primary School of this Union had been keeping its existence in a quite poor state. Persons interested in education of the area established the school back in 1970. So far this institution was being run as a registered school under the local initiative. The government took it over in 2013. At present, four teachers are there in this school. Md Kitab Ali is working as the head teacher while Md Shakhawat Hossain is the Chairman of the School Managing Committee. The number of students (boys and girls together) now stands at 225.

Md Kitab Ali, the head teacher, is a member of the community education watch group. In the mean time, he had visited Shibram Ideal Government Primary School of Gaibandha. Amjhupi Community Education Watch Group has already succeeded in getting enrolled seven students who had earlier dropped out of the education system. A mothers' assembly has been organized under the auspices of the Education Watch Committee. Meetings were held with the members of

the School Managing Committee to find ways to enhance the quality of learning. This initiative has led to 100% enrolment and the rate of attendance has also increased.

In March 2013, the SMC, Amjhupi Community Education Watch Committee and local guardians discussed about the enhancement of the quality of education and they together decided to recruit a para-teacher at a consolidated monthly salary of Taka three thousand only. The payment of the salary of the para-teacher is being arranged through the education watch committee with local assistance. As a result, 35 students appeared at the Primary School Certificate examination and all of them have come out successful.

At present, the rate of attendance has visibly increased. The environment of the school has also improved. The classes do have some attractive look. All the teachers are serving with sincerity. The Community Education Watch Group regularly visits the school and advises on matters of improvement. The local community and the teachers think that this institution would come up as the best school of the area.

Saad Ahammad



Campaign for 100% Enrolment, Prevention of Drop Out & Completion of Primary Education

A campaign program was launched to promote the above issues. Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and its partner organizations jointly organized day-long program at 8 districts of the country, namely, Meherpur, Gaibandha, Habiganj, Netrokona, Sirajganj, Bhola, Jamalpur and Khulna. The local Community Watch Groups had been actively involved in these events. Education Fairs were organized with slogans like 'Ensure Education for All', 'Ensure Enrolment of Children in the Schools', 'Participation of All to Ensure 100% Completion'. Seminar, theatrical performances and cultural functions featured the Fairs.



Whip Mirza Azam delivered his speech

In each of the campaign program at 8 places, approximately 2000 persons were present including the government officials, representatives of various NGOs and teachers' unions and media, local public representatives, students, guardians and cultural activists. Everyone made a common vow to play a responsible role in support of the slogans of the Fair. At Jamalpur, Mirza Azam, the Chief Whip of the Parliament was present as the special guest. District Education Officers and Chairmen of Union Parishads of respective areas were present in the event.

Abeda Sultana

'Ensure Education for All': Education Fair & Cultural program at Tegharia Union

On November 29, 2013, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and ASED, a local NGO of Habiganj, jointly organized an Education Fair at Tegharia Union Parishad ground with slogans like 'Ensure Education for All', 'Ensure Enrolment of Children in the Schools', 'Participation of All to Ensure 100% Completion'. Seminar, theatrical performances and cultural functions featured the Fair. The Fair was primarily organized to create and increase social awareness to involve local people to realize the slogans stated above.

Humayun Kabir, the local UP Chairman, Sharifuddin Ahmed

and Md Aminul Islam, members of the Tegharia Community Education Watch Group took part in the seminar. Among others, Abdul Quyyum, Secretary of the local UP and Raihan Uddin Chowdhury, a member of the Executive Committee of ASED were present.



The speakers of the seminar underlined on the necessity of social awareness for the cause of primary education. After the discussion session, Umednagar Friends Club staged a performance titled Boyra Samachar while Baul Abdur Rahman, Helena Aktar and Rubel Sarkar took part in the musical performance. The singers highlighted the objectives, importance and merits of education through their performances.

Jafar Iqbal Chowdhury

Sharing Workshop on Draft Manual on Sports and Cultural Activities

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) has developed two draft Manuals with a view to increase the practice of sports and cultural activities in the schools. In order to finalize the drafts, two sharing meetings were organized on December 26 and 29, 2013 at Saghata of Gaibandha and Amjhupi of Meherpur respectively. The Upazila Education Officer, Assistant Education Officer, Trainers of PTI, representatives of Upazila Resource Center and local elites were present in the meeting. The participants offered their views on the two Manuals with focus on local or country sports and cultural practices. At Saghata, Swabalambi Unnayan Sangstha was the partner in organizing the meeting, while at Meherpur it was held in collaboration with Manab Unnayan Kendra. About 50 persons took part in each of the meetings.



Annual Planning Meeting of Bhadrachhat Union Education Watch Group

The Annual Planning Meeting of Bhadrachhat Union Community Education Watch Group of Kamarkhand Upazila under the district of Sirajganj took place on December 28, 2013. Presided over by Md Enamul Haq Talukdar, the UP Chairman, the meeting was jointly organized by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and National Development Program (NDP), a local NGO. Dr A B M Sajjad Hossain, Director, NDP, and some 25 members of the Union Community Education Watch Group were present in the meeting. The meeting drafted some planning to ensure the access of all children to education, to prevent drop out and to ensure the participation of all children at the Primary School Certificate examination. All the members present reiterated their commitment to be active in the activities of Community Education Watch Group.



Orientation of Jhaail Union Community Education Watch Group

The orientation of Jhaail Union Community Education Watch Group of Kamarkhand Upazila under the district of Sirajganj took place on December 25, 2013.



The orientation program was jointly organized by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and National Development Program (NDP), a local NGO. Dr A B M Sajjad Hossain, Director, NDP delivered the welcome address. About 70 persons including the members of Community Watch Group, representatives of various educational institutions and persons interested in education were present in the meeting. The meeting identified some of the major problems in the area of primary education and discussed about the ways to find remedies to them. The participants tried to put up the problems of the schools in their respective areas and sorted out the ways to overcome them.

Jaya Sarkar

Seminar and Cultural Program at Tajmuddin, Bhola

On November 22, 2013, an event comprising of discussion, cultural festivity and fair took place at Chanchra Union of Tajmuddin upazila under Bhola district. The event was jointly organized by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and Grameen Jano Unnoyan Sangstha to create necessary social awareness regarding 100% enrolment of children in the schools, prevention of drop out and completion of primary education.



Presided over by M Alauddin, Vice-President of Chanchra Union Community Education Watch Group, Md Abu Taher Miah, UP Chairman was the chief guest of the seminar while Mr Zakir Hossain Mohin, Executive Director, Grameen Jano Unnoyan Sangstha was present as the special guest. Mr Abul Kalam Nirob, head teacher, Chanahra Junior Secondary School, Mr Giasuddin Khokan, an UP member, Mr Ripon Shan, a lecturer, Md Hannan Tipu, Ziaul Haq, President, Dholigournagar Education Watch Group and Harun-ur-Rashid, a member of the group spoke in the meeting.



Orientation of Watch Group to Prevent Drop Out

An orientation meeting was jointly organized by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and Grameen Jano Unnoyan Sangstha on November 17, 2013 in the hall-room of M A Ali School for the Disabled Children with the objective to enhance the quality of primary education, to create necessary social awareness regarding 100% enrolment of children in the schools and to prevent drop out of learners in primary education. It was presided over by Mr Zakir Hossain Mohin, Executive Director, Grameen Jano Unnoyan Sangstha. Floreda, a teacher and M A Ali, a Director of the School for the Disabled Children spoke on the occasion. A total of 70 members including 15 women of Watch Groups from Veduria and Charsamaya Unions of Sadar upazila of Bhola district took part in the orientation. The event was conducted by Zakir Hossain, the coordinator of Grameen Jano Unnoyan Sangstha.

Harun-ur-Rashid

Reflection of positive Trends in Primary Schools: Activities of Muktinagar Community Education Watch

Gaibandha is a district in the Rangpur Division. Many of the natural calamities like river erosion and flood have become a part of life of the people of this area. Naturally, the parents of this area had not been quite interested in and aware of the value of their children's education. They usually think that any possible income by the children is preferable to their education. In the Muktinagar Union of Saghata upazila under this district, there are in all 12 primary schools, including the government and non-government ones. As per the statistical information of the Upazila office, the rate of education in the Union is 40.07%, which lower than the national one. The activities of Muktinagar Union Community Education Watch Group started in 2008 under the leadership of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and supervision of Udayan Swabalambi Sangstha enhance the quality of primary education. These activities have already started leaving some positive marks in the area of operation.

The Process of the Formation of the Education Watch Group

The participation and awareness of the community is an imperative factor to ensure the quality of primary education. With this end in view, a 25-member Education Watch Group was formed. The Group has people from all walks of life including UP Chairman and members, teachers, SMC members, businessmen, media persons and representatives of the civil society. The UP Chairman and the Executive Director of the implementing organization were respectively elected as the President and General Secretary of the Watch Group. As per the work-plan prepared by the Education Watch Group, many of the activities have already been put to implementation in the Union.

Some Notable Activities of the Education Watch Group

- Survey of each house and educational institution of each village of the Union;
- Organizing meetings with the head teachers and SMC members of the schools:

- Communication and advocacy with local education administration
- Visit to schools and collection of necessary information;
- Organizing of school-based assembly of mothers/guardians;
- Observance of various Days in the schools;
- Exchange of views with the UP Standing Committee on education;
- Felicitation of the students who have been awarded stipends for their remarkable proficiency;
- Taking initiatives to visit model primary schools;
- Exhibition of different achievements in primary education through the organization of Education Fairs;
- Taking initiatives to get back the dropped out children into the schools.

Impact and Achievements

All the activities noted above have left some remarkable and positive impact in the area of primary education of the Union. These are noted below.

- The attendance of teachers have become more regular; now the rate of attendance is 95%;
- The attendance of teachers has increased; now the rate is 90%;
- The rate of successful graduation has increased; now the rate is 98%;
- The rate of enrolment has increased; now the rate is 100%;
- Drop out has come down to zero;
- SMC meetings are being held regularly; the attendance of members has increased;
- The degree of parents' awareness to educate their children has increased;
- The classes start and finish punctually;
- The accountability of the teachers and SMC members has increased;



- The participation in the terminal examination has been ensured; the present rate of success is 100%;
- Mothers' assembly is regularly organized in each of the schools;
- Proper expenditure of government grant has been ensured;
- Environment for quality education has been created in the schools;
- The provision of safe water and sanitation has been ensured;
- Assemblies of students are held regularly;
- Supervision by relevant authorities has increased;
- A congenial relationship has been developed among the teachers, SMC members, guardians and education administration officials;
- The recruitment of teachers for pre-primary education has been completed in 12 (government & non-government) schools;
- Cub teams have been formed in each school;
- 100% admission of students graduating from Class V to Class VI has been ensured;
- Students showing extra-ordinary proficiency have been awarded with prizes;
- Annual sports has been arranged;
- 3 teachers have been recruited in 3 different schools for successful lobbying with the District Education Officer;
- Consequent to lobbying with the UP Chairman, 60 pairs of benches have been supplied to 12 schools and all the students of Class V have received bags and umbrellas;
- Advocacy with the UP and Upazila administration has led to the assurance of allocation of Taka 4 lakh for the running of pre-primary education.

Challenges

- Some problems crop up in realizing the activities due to lack of specific planning and constraints of budget;
- Implementation of the activities is hindered because of the budget constraints of the partner organizations;
- In the absence of a personnel with responsibility of documentation and supervision, many activities implemented at the field level by the Community Education Watch Group cannot be properly recorded;
- Induction of women members of the Education Watch Group who can be involved in social activities is a serious problem.



Lessons Learnt

- Implementation of any program becomes easy with community participation;
- Since the Watch Group is comprised of persons from diverse backgrounds, collection and dissemination of information become easy;
- Awareness program for the mothers/guardians help prevent drop out and increase school attendance;
- Awareness building among the teachers and SMC members help increase the rate of education;
- Regular supervision of schools by the education officials contributes to the enhancement of the quality of education;
- Watch Group activities can ensure the accountability of teachers and SMC members;
- Watch Group can help solve many problems through lobbying at the Union, Upazila and district levels.

According to upazila statistical office, the rate of education of Muktinagar Union now stands at 67.31%. The local people are of the opinion that if some kind of social awakening takes place to achieve the goal of Education for All through community participation for the cause of primary education, the education rate of this Union can be increased to 100%.

Shahadat Hossain Mandal





Rasheda K. choudhury, Executive Director of CAMPE with Learners of Gabtoli City Colony School.

Let's Move Forward

Just some years ago, when we used to move to Class V, busy preparations started immediately for the Primary Scholarship Examination. However, not everyone got the chance to face it. The teachers only selected those who had been showing consistent competence in the earlier grades. That certainly made them sad who had failed to qualify. Our friends shared with us that their parents had scolded them for their incompetence. Some persons even used to remark, "Oh! You couldn't qualify for the Scholarship Examination, a bleak future awaits you."

You are simply lucky. All of you, the students of Class V now have the opportunity to appear at the Primary School Certificate Examination. You are doing remarkably well, winning the scholarships and others can now find a lot of encouragement from your performance. But, at the same time, I must say that your goal should not be limited to scoring high marks in the exam. You will have to learn to do some good things for your country, yes, for your family and the society as a whole. You have to be enlightened individuals. I am not underestimating the value of exams. This certainly is important. The results reflect the intensity of your labour and you deserve recognition for that. As some of the students prove their brilliance in the examinations, in spite of their rural background and severe hardships and scarcity of opportunities, we become just not amazed, we adore

them. We admire them. Many persons come forward to look after their higher studies in future.

In fact, education is a life-long business. There is no end to learning; there is no limitation of age for learning. Examination is only one step to test yourself. To climb that step, you need courage and the trust on yourself. Rote learning is never a good answer. You have to comprehend things, to practice the lessons regularly and when necessary, you should ask your teachers to get clarification of certain questions. All these largely help you to obtain high marks in the terminal exam. Well, to become a bookworm for the whole day is not a good habit. Your engagement in sports or practicing musical lessons will keep you healthy both physically and mentally. When you score high marks in the exam. it's something that makes you jubilant and at the same time, as your friends show similar performance, that should add to your happiness. In fact, the Primary School Certificate Examination is one step to move forward in your life. We all sincerely wish that your movement ahead would be a great journey; all your labours should have excellent returns.

Rasheda K Chaudhury
Executive Director, CAMPE

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Phone : 8115769, 9130427, 8155031-2, Fax : 9123842

Email : info@campebd.org; Website : www.campebd.org

