

Good Language Teaching and Good Language Learning



Rod Bolitho with the interviewer

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

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 Studies 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 words like 'miscreant' or 'dacoit' or 'local status'.

world outside. If you speak to someone in Britain about the world outside, 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 converteds 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, it's the learners who have to think in future — let the teachers help the learners to think. Do not spoonfeed. Spoonfeeding is no use.