

Making Schooling A Fruitful Experience

One successful example of alternative education is the schools being run by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) wherein children, especially very poor children who cannot be reached by government schools or, once reached, do not stay in school can receive some education. The success of these schools is recorded in the number of children being absorbed back into the regular system. But getting more children into schools is not enough in itself and the emphasis has to be shifted from how many people are in attendance to how many are gaining from the experience, for too many children are going through the school system without being able to read and write or solve simple problems.

The quality of education provided in many schools is often so distressingly poor that even those who persist in their studies find, to their everlasting regret, that the standard of education they have received has not fitted them for higher studies in city colleges or universities and many fail to pass national examinations. A primary school that graduates pupils who cannot read, write or solve simple problems has obviously failed them. Therefore, there should be a greater concentration on finding out how many children actually benefit from the present system. In other words, are they really learning and are they getting the essential knowledge and skills—and the values they need to go through life?

Even in the industrialised countries educationists are alarmed at the increasing numbers of children leaving school who are functionally illiterate and, therefore, unable to realise their potential in a highly technologically complex society. The only difference between these children and our own is that remedial courses are usually available to those who seek them whereas here they simply join the army of street children.

As meeting the needs of basic learning requires creativity and the imaginative use of all possible means at their disposal many developing countries may need to turn more to other channels for imparting education such as religious or community-based education. They will also need to call more upon radio and television to supplement courses for schools. Already television is being used for imparting training to teachers by means of the Open University and it is hoped to expand such services in the near future. But without proper supervision aimed at maintaining standards all these efforts will come to naught.