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Case Studies In Primary Education

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THE following case studies, briefly summarized, indicate some of the experiments that are being made in primary education in the developing world. Some of the goals they try to achieve are to spread primary education more widely, to serve community needs more fully in rural areas, to improve educational quality and appeal (i.e. lower dropout rates), and do these at low cost.

INDIA: THE SOCIAL WORK AND RESEARCH CENTRE'S PRIMARY EDUCATION PROJECT: The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) is an indigenous organization in Ajmer district, Rajasthan, whose basic aim is to strengthen the control that villagers have over their own lives. They sponsor innovative experiments in community organization. In this case their objective was to test a new teaching approach to providing basic education to meet the needs of rural children. The project described here was supported by India's National Centre for Education Research and Training from 1975 to 1978.

As part of their efforts to make schooling more relevant to problems of rural India, SWRC launched an experiment in primary education in the schools of three isolated rural villages. The experiment included three major changes from traditional schooling. The schools' regular teachers were reassigned to other areas and were replaced by six young local recruits with no teacher training—two farmers, two priests, a widow, and an unemployed youth. They were given a brief training session at the SWRC campus, followed by weekly workshops throughout the school year with SWRC staff and visiting specialists. These were open workshops, in which issues and problems were discussed freely and critically. New ideas were proposed and the schools' performance evaluated.

In order to make the schools as accessible as possible to the learners, the school hours were adjusted: younger students and those who were free attended a morning shift (8 a.m. to noon) while those who worked during the day attended the evening session (7 to 10 p.m.). This later schedule was especially suited to former dropouts who work. The objectives of the official syllabus in language and numeracy skills were retained, but the SWRC programme designers made substantial changes in both the teaching methodologies and the curriculum. Changes were in line with the goal of providing students with more interesting experiences grounded in their own social, economic, and physical environment. The school was a "learning centre" that had its own garden and animals. The village itself was considered an extension of the school and villagers with special skills were drawn into the school as "teachers". Subjects were taught through work projects, group discussion, field trips, and observation. Each learning centre developed its own teaching materials and aids.

Results: From the beginning, evaluation was part of the experiment. Technical help for this was provided by the Regional College of Education. By the end of the second year, the number of 6 to 11 year olds attending school had risen substantially, and the dropout rate had declined. These students were then tested against their counterparts in two traditional schools of the region. Scores for reading and listening comprehension were considerably higher in the experimental schools. The results were the same with environmental studies. Although the difference was not as marked, arithmetic scores were also higher in the exprerimental schools.

The feelings of the community toward their experimental schools varied. Lower-caste villagers were more supportive than the upper castes. There was some lack of cooperation from the village leaders because of the schools' direct approach to the parents rather than to the leaders. As the experiment progressed, community support grew. Parents of one village, for example, offered free labour to dig wells for the schools.

As in many efforts of this sort, the care and maintenance of the school gardens created problems. In the SWRC case, the watering and other routine chores when the school was closed presented difficulties. In other instances, either fruits of the labours are often not democratically distributed, or children of lower class are expected to do all the work. Sometimes the schedule for animal care and the school schedule did not coincide; and there were some labour and cost problems.

The overall assessment of the primary programme was that it had successfully shown that a radically different approach to rural schooling was possible, but that achieving best results required the dedicated and continuing attention of workers who believe in the ability of rural residents to solve their problems.

GUATEMALA: PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Two-thirds of Guatemala's primary-age school children live in rural areas where there is only one classroom for an average 140 children. Of the 29 per cent of the total school-age population that is in the school, only 2 percent reach the 6th grade; only 4 percent of the rural schools offer six grades. Of the adult population, 70 percent are illiterate. In a still on-going project started in 1971, experimental schools were founded to address this situation.

When Guatemala was seeking education funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development, The World Bank UNESCO and the Inter-American Development Bank, the government made a detailed analysis of its educational system and devised a plan for reform. Four primary schools were designated 'pilot schools': two were located in the Ladino (mixed Spanish and Indian) region, and two in the Indian highland areas. These four schools would serve as teaching laboratories; they would provide grades one to six, and become receiver schools for three to five "satellite" schools. These satellite schools were the traditional one-room, three-grade schools from which very few students had bothered to seek further education. The pilot schools hoped to reduce the dropout rate and thus the per-pupil cost.

The pilot schools serve as laboratories to introduce new techniques, and as teacher-training centres. Four other six-grade schools were selected as controls for comparison during the experiment. The pilot schools test project-centered instruction materials in arithmetic and the natural and social sciences, all of which are based on rural life. The staffs of each of the schools have developed supplementary textbooks for the specific regions and language of the pilot schools. Learning subjects include agriculture, health, nutrition home economic and industrial arts. The schools are provided with pumps, irrigation equipment, and libraries and each school has land for a farm plot and equipment. The schools serve as centres for adult evening classes as well.

The pilot schools test new methodologies, new curricula new administrative organization, and new supervisory techniques. With a tested method of improving primary education, it is hoped that secondary education in the country will later be upgraded. All aid organizations are in agreement that to improve secondary education, the quality of the student entering from primary schools has to be improved.

Results: Evaluation of the project showed that the output of the pilot schools' sixth grade had increased 40 percent since 1969. There were higher promotion rates in pilot schools than in the control schools for all grades (88.5 percent v. 55 percent) and higher enrollment in grades four to six in the pilot schools than the controls (46.5 percent v. 35 percent). In 28 major comparisons between the pilot and control schools, the pilot schools scored significantly higher in 21 grade or subject areas. A ratio of 40 students per teacher was reached in the pilot schools. Detailed curricula for each of six primary grades have now been developed and tested. A new loan-funded normal schools is using these curricula and teaching methods developed in the pilot schools. For the first time, screening procedures for incoming teachers have been initiated. Out of 700 teacher candidates, 180 were chosen and trained at the pilot schools.

In the area of practical teaching, the schools agricultural projects are now self-financing. Community parents in the pilot areas, under supervision of pilot school technicians, increased their corn and bean production 400 percent in 1973 through use of recommended fertilizers. Parents are participating in increasing numbers in school programmes and are making use of the industrial arts shop facilities.

PHILIPPINES AND INDONESIA: PROJECT IMPACT/ PROYEK PAMONG: In 1974, the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) with funding from the Canadian International Development and Research Center and the Governments of the Philippines and Indonesia, attempted to develop an effective and economical delivery system for mass primary education. They came up with the concept of Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers (IMPACT). Two experimental sites were chosen, Cebu Island in the Philippines and Surakarta, Indonesia. In the former the project is called IMPACT, in Indonesia the acronym PAMONG (with the same meaning) is used. In both cases the project goals are to make primary education available to all children as the school-age population continues to rise, to use existing teachers more effectively, and to reduce the dropout rate and the per-student cost.

The teacher's role is changed from instructor to "manager" of a variety of instructional elements, including community volunteers, self-instructional learning modules, remedial classes led by older students, peer-teaching/learning, parental monitoring, and the overseeing of up to four times as many pupils as in a conventional setting. Of these various elements, the self-instructional modules are the core. The standard government syllabus has not been changed but was rewritten in the form of modules. A module takes up one idea or subject, and 'packages' the subject in the form of a self-instructional booklet that takes the student from a pre-test, through the concept to be learned, to a posttest. The pre-test indicates how much the student already knows; the post-test is given by the "manager" to see whether the student has learned the subject well enough to go on to the next subject and its module. It takes the average student about one week to complete one module.

Schools become community learning centres where classrooms are replaced by "learning kiosks" built by community parents. Here small groups of pupils gather to work on a subject module with their peers, and then move from one kiosk to another with other students to work on other modules. Older pupils rotate the responsibilities of instructing the lower grades in reading and writing, testing them in comprehension and simple mathematics, and

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