

Text-Book Teaching and Adult Education

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What is the difference between adult education which the country had in the last few decades and the present National Adult Education Programme? An important adult educator was once asked this simple question. Pat came the reply, "Earlier, less people were educated in more time; now more people are educated in less time." This sums up the difference between the past and the present programmes.

If adult education programmes are to gain momentum and to become effective instrument of development and 'Centres for Rural Education', they should change functionally, pleads the author. Today, there is an over-emphasis on text-book teaching, which impedes the progress of education. An adult illiterate should be taught what he wants to learn and not what someone else wants to teach him. If NAEP, with its diverse needs and varied interests is to cover the whole country, no universal system of text-book teaching can accomplish the task. The relevance of the text-book will have to be tested on the basis of socio-economic realities and environments.

In an informal discussion, an eminent person in the field of Adult Education was asked to comment upon the difference between adult education that the country has seen in the previous decades and the present National Adult Education Programme. His answer was simple. 'Earlier, less people were educated in more time; now, more people are educated in less time. Excluding this, there is not much difference between the two'.

It seems this has been the tragedy of adult education. In this situation, the adult education classes will remain, as 'night schools' as they were called earlier, and never become 'centres for rural education' in the changed circumstances leading to the development of illiterate folk. Though the adult education programmes have changed technically, they are yet to undergo a change functionally.

Over-emphasis on Text-book Teaching

The experts, who plan and implement adult education for illiterates, have always looked at the problems of illiterates from their own point of view and *not* from illiterates' point of view. And also they are unable to come out of the habit of teaching everything—literacy, numeracy, professional skills, etc., through text-books. Realities of the situation in which adult education takes place are ignored. It seems that this over-emphasis on textbook teaching technology is also an impediment in the success of adult education programmes. So far, the innumerable experiments in the field of adult education have tried to improve the

text-book designing and text- book teaching technology. And as far as my knowledge goes, experts have not come out of the need of text-book for adult education.

Here is an example for expert's opinion about illiterates as reflected in a text-book. Recently I came across 'Innovation in Adult Education-Primer' in the local dialect. This is about a primer prepared in one of the dialects of a certain state. This primer uses two key words 'x' and 'a' (I am using code words here). The lessons centred around these two words. In one of the lessons, 'x' takes a loan from the bank to purchase 'a'. But he spends the same loan amount for conducting some ceremony. Since he misuses the money, the police arrests him. Moral of this lesson is that money should not be misused.

Now let us examine this lesson. First of all, the expert who writes this type of lesson has only a negative attitude towards the learners. This is exhibited in his book for illiterates as in his opinion all of them are going to misuse money. Secondly, this type of theme creates a sort of inferiority complex among the learners and the illiterates feel shy to look at this type of illustrations drawn in the lesson. Or such a lesson conveys in others how one can misuse the money. Can this motivate the learner and quicken the pace of learning in him? Instead of this, the positive approach would have been to teach the illiterate that it is his right to take loan from the bank for development and it is his duty to make proper use of it and return it in time to the bank. An adult illiterate is to be taught what he wants and not what some one want to teach him or Text-Book Teaching & Adult Education what some one presumes an illiterate wants to learn.

Universal Text-book Teaching

Then what are the grounds on which one can question the validity of universal text-book teaching in adult education ? The NAEP, in its literacy, numeracy and other educational programmes, proposes to cover a vast number of people spread throughout the country with diverse needs and varied interests. One text- book or ten different textbooks in one language for the people in a state may not be the reliable tools to eradicate illiteracy by retaining their initial motivation and progress towards education as the learning interests and needs of these people are diverse. During learning, an adult makes a conscious effort to learn. At every stage he will be linking his immediate progress in other fields of life with literacy. He will be trying to ' judge his text-book and its relevancy on the basis of socioeconomic realities' that he is facing. Practically such a situation is not feasible or be solved by a sing le medicine or text-book. Something more than a text-book is required.

In a state like Karnataka, many dialects of Kannada are spoken. Can one text-book of Mysore Kannada be used for literacy purposes in all the districts of the state? Can a man from Bidar, Bijapur or Gulburga understand this Mysore Kannada for learning script and message? In case of numeracy, do people

throughout Karnataka count as 'ondu' or 'eradu', or do they do it differently? Many questions like this can be asked. The so-called standard Kannada used in text-books for formal education is nobody's mother tongue. It is only an abstract entity.

If text-book becomes the tool of adult education and is written in the standard Kannada one can assume the situation that the learners may have to face. It will be like imposing literates' idiom on illiterates. While learning, the difference between the learners' variety of language and the variety of language introduced in the text book creates an inferiority in the learners. It is teaching something to some one in some other person's idiom. It fails to create 'ownness' in learners.

The next question is of non-Kannada speaking persons living in Karnataka. There are a good number of Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi and other language-speaking people in Karnataka. What about educating illiterates speaking these languages? In which language are they to be educated? What literacy programmes are there for these people? The last but not the least is of limiting of learning. By providing a text-book into the hands of a teacher and a learner, the adult education system officially and probably unknowingly is blocking the wide range of informal learning that can take place, and limits the learning to text-book. If the adult education teacher has a text-book in hand, he is not ready to go beyond that and teach any thing more or less than that. Any amount of instructions may not make him to teach beyond the text-book. For him text-book is every thing; in other words, adult education is reduced to text-book teaching. Text-book is defined as a 'learning instrument' which is always flexible. Is this question of flexibility applicable in-case of this system?

Alternative to Text-book Teaching

If so, what is an alternative to the text-book teaching technology in adult education? If adult education is examined in this broader perspective, a three-phase picture will emerge. The first phase is of literacy-literacy in the idiom of learners to suit the illiterates' interests and needs; the second phase is of bridging the gap between the learners' idiom and the standard idiom in which almost all the reading and other material is available; the third phase is of making available the needed literature on developmental and other programmes beneficial to neo-literates and other people in simple idiom, in addition to all other material that interests adult learner. In case of NAEP, if the adult education teacher is a local literate, he is the person who is aware of the local needs, problems and idiom as also the interests and desires of his learners. It is true that the problems of people could be the starting points from which adult education can begin with. These are the basic tools from which a teacher can create or make his own literacy, numeracy and other necessary educational material. Only then the learner can find his learning relevant and need-based.

Learning through Standard Idiom

Now the question arises what actually does a literacy primer consist of? It consists of certain quantity of vocabulary items that are used by the illiterates and the lessons that are frequently constructed with certain themes considered to be relevant to a learner. If the adult education teacher is provided with the technique of collecting and arranging of words and themes for literacy purposes, he can prepare the initial literacy materials. He can also guide the transition of learning from learners' idiom to standard idiom, because of his background of formal education in the standard idiom. Information material of the third phase can be deciphered by the neo-literates and others with or without the help of adult education worker at any stage of their learning.

Of course, by this type of approach one cannot be over ambitious and have high expectations from adult education teacher. In this case it is not possible to achieve 80% or 90% of statistical success but, no doubt, it is possible to expect good quality and quantity of success. One can easily say that it is impracticable because of several reasons one can quote, but let us not look at this from our - expert point of view. It is hoped that it would be possible to tap the education that rural literates happen to have and make it available to their own illiterate people.