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FOREWARD

RABSEL is one of those many beautiful words in our national language that is replete with multiple meanings and rich connotations. Rabsel, at its most basic level means crystal clear. At another level, it means window or balcony. Still at another level, rabsel means the sun.

There is a common core to all these meanings though. They all have something essentially characteristic of the very nature of education – providing a view as through a window, dispelling of darkness, of ignorance, as by the sun, or making clear.

Education is at heart a normative art, or a creative science. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the Centre for Educational Research and Development should choose to call its journal Rabsel. The publication of this educational journal is expected to show the way forward for our teachers and educators to engage in practical research as in the themes included here, and share their ideas with the bigger community of fellow-teachers.

I hope Rabsel will provide the much-needed forum to our teachers and educators to develop themselves professionally and keep themselves abreast of the developments in their respective fields.

I commend this maiden initiative of our CERD and urge it to continue its efforts to engage our education community in exploring the frontiers of knowledge and promote the cause of education in the interest of our children and the system.

Tashi Delek.

SangayNgedup

Minister
Health and Education

Notes for an Editorial

Rabsel is an idea whose time has come. There are many areas in our education system which need to be studied in the interest of quality as we forge ahead to expand coverage. There are many highly motivated teachers and educators too who need a forum to share their ideas and findings with individuals who have a stake in the system. There are still others who feel that research is a special job that special people do in some special places 'out there'.

However, in today's fast-changing world, teaching and research must go hand in hand to keep the profession both relevant and viable. And research can be done on a common theme the study habits of children, the impact of teacher attitude on learning, or how one might approach a certain sonnet by Shelley! Not discounting the other great fields though.

As you can see, we have here quite a down-to-earth assortment of papers based on practical experiences of our fellow-teachers, included in this Autumn 2002 issue of Rabsel. English being a hot topic of debate these days, there are more papers on the different aspects of the subject though. But other critical issues affecting education in general are also featured. Future editions of Rabsel will focus on other areas of concern.

Rabsel is your journal. Please be a part of the exciting idea and give voice to your insights and discoveries. Nothing is more important than ensuring that our children get the best education possible for the greater good of our country and the quality of the life of our people. Your ideas could well be shaping decisions and actions affecting education and our country. Rabsel is a small step in a long journey. Leave your mind-prints here.

Thakur Singh Powdyel
Director

THE ROLE AND PLACE OF CHILDREN'S ART IN BHUTANESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Taking my cue from the general theory that art makes an important contribution to childhood education and learning, I investigated, in Bhutanese schools, why children make art, what they learn through art-making, and the role of art-making. I talked to pre-primary through grade three children in three different schools in Bhutan and collected their drawings. To understand and explain particular features in Bhutanese children's drawings, I applied Wilson's (1982) notion of reality-building.

My study confirms that Bhutanese children's drawings are no different from any other children's drawings in the world. They possess evidence of the same innate tendencies and social and cultural influences that children's drawings from Japan, Canada or Egypt possess. Through this study, it became clear to me that there are two different kinds of child art - *spontaneous art* and *school art* - and that these exist in Bhutan. They represent the different interests of teacher's objectives and student's motives. Curriculum development in art education should work to accommodate both.

Introduction

It is a truism that better understanding of the child's mind is an urgent need if society is to protect itself from the waste and destruction caused by mis-education, but the statement needs repetition. Child art can be a valuable key to adult understanding of the mental growth and educational needs of children.

(Rhoda Kellogg, 1969, p.2)

Everyone lives in a world of his or her own. "...no one 'world' is more 'real' than all others, none is ontologically privileged as the unique real world" (Burner, 1986, p.96). Big or small, good or bad, the kind of world we live in is a "product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world" (Burner, 1986, p.95). I think, we begin to imagine our worlds as early as we can think. The urge to express these worlds is evident once a child starts drawing. Drawing comes naturally to most children. It is a common observation that children draw or represent what they know without specifically being told to do so. For some, it is spontaneous while others copy.

Spontaneous art and school art

The route to drawing according to Wilson (1982) is " ... one of interaction between the child's innate propensities and those influences from outside the child") p.169). Those outside influences can be what they learn in their social, cultural, and historical traditions, what they learn in school, and from popular media. There emerge then two

distinct kinds of child art what Wilson and Wilson describe as *spontaneous art* and *school art*. Spontaneous art comes from the child's own desire to create, while school art is frequently encouraged by a teacher, parent, or any other adult member in a family. School art is often enforced by the institutions in which the child is expected to learn specific things based on specific subject aims and objectives.

Of the two kinds of art that children make, Wilson and Wilson believe that the spontaneous art is by far more important because it represents children's personal and developing ideas about themselves and their world. And that school art should be moved closer to spontaneous at so that " by taking its cues from the more spontaneous work, school art can become richer in drawing and ideas and less self-consciously concerned with media and processes, and thus ultimately to greater benefit to the child's reality-building abilities" (p.xvi). That is why the Wilsons believe it is best to allow children to seek their own sources for which necessary resources have to be made available. In Bhutanese schools, so far, there is no proper resource, time, space, and guidance provided. Let us see how Bhutanese children fare in their art.

In the *Druk English Development Programme* for pre-primary classes, children draw and paint pictures in block one in the fourth week. So, whether or not there are art programmes in Bhutanese schools, children begin to learn to draw and paint from the fourth week of their first year in school. The first drawing they are introduced to is the "house" (Figure 1). Believe it or not, this figure gets imprinted in children's mind so firmly that whenever they may think of drawing any house, what comes to their mind is the simplex box-like house to which they are first introduced.

Figure 2 shows three houses drawn by each pre-primary child from three different schools. Two of the children said it is their house and one of them said it is his uncle's house. But Bhutanese houses don't look like these. Had the children been not introduced to the same figure, I suspect they might have drawn different houses. Each student tries to draw differently, but they can't get away from the similar features to which they are first introduced. This implies the need for alternate models.

As children go on to grade one and two, they have exercises in English development activities such as – reading, draw and writing.. Their workbooks contain well-illustrated drawings of various activities which teachers use as examples. For example, from the *Druk English Development programme* for grade two children, here are the instructions on how to draw a house:

Draw a house in your book.
Its roof is a triangle.
Its door is a rectangle.
It has two windows. They are small squares.
Colour the triangle red and the rectangle blue (p.6).

This exercise does test children's conceptions of shapes and colours, but it does not say that there are different ways of drawing a house, that not all roofs are triangles and not all windows are squares. Literally, children learn from their workbooks and from their teacher's instructions of what to draw, how to draw, and what colour to use.

These common subjects or themes that teachers use as examples stereotype children's visions of creating their own drawings. It follows that, if it is about a farmer, children think of him as ploughing a field; if it is a rose, children think of colouring it red; if it

is about a teacher, it is about teaching. Other than teaching, what else do we see a teacher do?" Other than red, what colours do roses have? School art doesn't include much beyond these common appearances of things and actions. School art lacks the child's rhythm and expressiveness. This is because...the child may be incapable of devising new points of view, movement, or variations of the copied objects, the copy often becomes a frozen and inflexible schema which the child is unable to employ in ways other than that of the original image (Wilson and Wilson, 1982, p.76).

However, children do develop the skill to produce conventional drawings that have a style and technique, mastery that is necessary before the artist is able to go beyond the conventional to the creative according to Wilson and Wilson. Some children are able to go beyond what they are told to do or copy and incorporate beautiful ideas of their own, but children with such talents are fewer in Bhutanese schools because of a lack of proper help and encouragement, as well as a lack of space and places of their own to draw.

Art school, teachers are concerned with syllabus coverage - that they have to finish teaching each lesson or a topic as scheduled in their weekly, monthly, or yearly planning. All that the children draw for them is subject-related and teachers don't have time to look beyond into children's creations. At home, parents are concerned with children's homework, that children study well and get good grades. To be promoted to the next class, it is the mark that matters and not drawings. Parents are happy when their children bring good grades in their studies and not their good drawings. All need to understand that art, music, and play, each has its role for the human mind to be active and creative for any success. Many of the children I talked to said they didn't draw at home. Some of the spontaneous drawings I have collected were done as a kind of plan for their play or part of their play and not necessarily to show to anybody at home or at school other than their friends. Why do they not show us what they draw? Perhaps, it is because we have not yet let them know that we value their at-making.

From all the drawings that I have collected, about seventy percent is *school art*. The subject matter or themes of these drawings are replicas of illustrations from textbooks and teachers' ideas used as examples in the class. Only about thirty percent of the drawings are spontaneous art - either transformed from the school art or influenced by popular media such as video and television, and from what they see in their environment, dotted with human-made objects such as roads, houses, and landscapes against the natural background of mountains, rivers, trees, flowers, and so forth.

In spontaneous art, we not only see teachers' and others' ideas, but also children's own ideas incorporated in what others have inspired in them or from their own inspirations. In spontaneous art, children draw, they see far beyond the confines of their classroom and school activities into the past, present, and future, and explore their dreams and desires, their understanding of self and others, pain and pleasure, good and evil.

Wilson and Wilson (1982) believe these things are the keys to understanding children's worlds. What are their worlds made of? Their worlds are made of what the Wilsons (1982) describe as the four basic realities: inventing the familiar - the *common reality*, delineating a concept of self - the *archaeological reality*, experimenting with good and bad - the *normative reality*, and drawing the future- the *prophetic reality*. These realities are made up of people, objects, and events. According to Anne Haas Dyson (1990), children use "the movements of *play*, the lines of *drawing*, and the sound of *language* to represent or symbolize people, objects, and events" (p.58), which make up their world.

The Fusion of Realities: A Revelation of Possible Worlds

Not only do the drawings of children create Erikson's model situations "in which aspects of the past are re-lived, the present represented and renewed" but "the future (is) anticipated" as well. All of us anticipate the future and seek to control future wants in variety of ways. We construct, refine, and rehearse anticipated events, encounters, and conversations. Art has served this future-anticipating function for countless civilizations, and probably for as long as art has existed. (Wilson and Wilson, 1982, p.32).

According to Wilson (1982), "it is not possible to isolate one reality, but that several realities are most often jointly fused so that...the archaeological reality of self are held up to careful examination, as the normative reality and archeological fuse" (p.31). In her series of four drawings (Figure 3-6), Yangzom (age 12) explores her entire world. It is not only about her past and the present, but also her future. She sees far ahead into her future.

Her incredible story begins as a child in her remote village in Eastern Bhutan. What she misses most about her home in their village is her cat and puppy. They were poor and their house was just a bamboo hut (Figure 3). Now they have a bigger house (Figure 4). They have vegetable and flower gardens. They also have a toilet, which is quite a novelty for Yangzom. As we can see, the toilet is not inside house but some distance away from the house. This is a new thing for Yangzom because they never had a toilet before in their village. They would go into the forest instead.

The third house (Figure 5) doesn't exist. This is in her future plan. When I met Yangzom, she was in grade three at Wamrong Primary School. She didn't tell me how long she was going to study but she was optimistic as we could see her future house. It is a three-storey building. Until now she never mentioned her parents and siblings. Along with her new house, she introduces her mother, father, and two sisters. Her youngest sister is with her mother and father on the first floor, left room. In the middle is her father and on the right, her mother. Her middle sister's room is on the right, first floor. Her room is on the second floor. Each has his/her own space. To have such spacious and comfortable home for the family is her desire. Once she fulfills this wish for her family, she has a plan for herself. And that is her adventure abroad. The destination and purpose of her new adventure we don't know, but she is ready to take off in her new episode.

Yangzom is dressed up in Western clothes (Figure 6) and she doesn't look like a Bhutanese girl anymore. Her suitcase is packed and she is ready to leave. She doesn't reveal where she is going, how she is going, and for what she is going. All that remains a mystery. However, the media influences suggest her fantasy about Archie's world. Her appearance resembles Archie's girl-friend, Veronica, especially the hairdo. She has made some changes with the dress to suit her. At heart, she is still a Bhutanese and maybe that is why she has not exposed much of her body like Veronica. It makes me wonder how far Yangzom has explored Archie's world in the comic books she read. Does she really believe the fantasy world of Archie to be true?. Does she want to explore it on her voyage abroad? Whatever it may be, let us assume what Wilson and Wilson (1982) believe:

Children are able to use drawings as a means for creating a working model or models of the world, its dangers and joys. Some children may then manipulate and control every aspect of that world as they cannot in the everyday world (.37).

Eisner (1982) concurs with these beliefs:

...it allows them to practice in the context of play what they cannot actually do in the 'the real world'. It affords them opportunities to empathetically participate in the life of another. Given that ego-centrism is the psychological condition of the young child, the opportunity to learn to empathize, to feel like, as well as to feel for others is an important ingredient in becoming a social being. The symbols that children create and manipulate afford them opportunities to learn such skills. Empathy requires the ability to imaginatively project; art is a means for cultivating such an ability (230).

But who knows? With her determination Yangzom will be able to do what she wants in her life and will travel abroad. There are worlds out there, where she may find similar fantasies that she has been dreaming about or a different world that she needs to experience.

Implications

When English medium schools were first opened in Bhutan in the early 1960's, we were literally following Indian curricula. To make the curricula more Bhutanese, especially in primary level, many changes have been made such as the *New Approach to Primary Education* curriculum. From then on, there have been several curriculum reviews. I know we made tremendous progress overall. One of the aims of *Environmental Studies* for pre-primary (1980) states that: "*Children will be able to appreciate the need for proper dress and to learn suitable conduct in the world outside the classroom, according to our traditions*" (p.2). Coming to specific aims such as this, I don't know if we have been successful. I don't know how adequate the instructional activities have been to inculcate in children such values. The fact is, children don't care what is traditionally right or wrong. They just learn what is most interesting for them. And such learning need not be at school or at home. The media influence is so powerful these days that children can learn from any street corner. As Wilson (1997) says, no matter how much we resist the changes, "children will continue to entertain and educate themselves through their self-initiated art" (p.93). My study indicates, quite clearly, the conflict of interest what Wilson (1997) mentions.

In her narrative drawing episodes, Yangzom sees herself in different worlds. Opposed to wearing the traditional dress and following the Bhutanese ways of life, we see Yangzom in Archie's world resembling Veronica. To be a *Shaktimaan, Rambo, or Ninja* which I have not mentioned in this report is also not a traditional idea or part of any curricular intentions. What does this study tell us? What do we learn from such evidence? Answers to these questions have direct implication for teachers, administrators, and educational policy makers.

Drawings demonstrate what children know about themselves, their society, culture, and the world around them - both real and imagined. As children draw, paint, and sculpt they "...structure their time in a way that is meaningful to them and that will enable them to recognize and work through their problems" (Orton, 1997, p.296).

In addition to addressing current conflicts according to Geraldine Leitel Orton, we may be able to assess the child's overall personality, strengths and weakness and coping style. In that way, through children's art work, we gain insight into children's

behaviours and the complex and varied ways in which children grow and develop. To make the complex and varied ways in which children grow and develop more healthy and refined, a crucial role has to be played by teachers, administrators, educational policy makers and parents. We can't blame children for whatever they do because often the fault is with the adults. We often confuse children. We contradict ourselves. We say one thing and do another. In our schools, we follow strict Bhutanese moral codes and conduct. What is said and done in the schools is not followed by everyone outside. At home, parents emphasize Bhutanese social, cultural, and family values, , while, through entertainment such as toys, video games, and movies, they emphasize totally different things. We can't stop what children learn from outside worlds. So how do we make what is being stressed in the curriculum as compelling?

My study confirms that Bhutanese children are no different from any other children in the world. Their drawings possess evidence of the same innate tendencies and social, cultural, and historical influences that children's drawings from Canada, Japan, or Egypt possess. In the drawings I have studied, Bhutanese children created worlds where they too journeyed through the past, present, and treatment. Their drawings should be encouraged and nurtured. Their drawings should be "looked at, talked about, appreciated, and understood, and not disdained, derided, nor ignored" (Wilson and Wilson, 1982, p.37). As the Wilsons (1982) mention, "there is more to children's drawing than has been recognized and certainly a good deal more than meets the eye" (p.37).

It is also important that we understand the two different kinds of art children produce - spontaneous art and school art. As Wilson (1997) mentions, school art is almost always the result of collaboration between the teacher and students. In such collaboration, especially in Bhutanese schools, the idea is often dominated by teachers. That is why children end up doing stereotyped drawings. When we encourage what to draw and how to draw, it should not be always what we think art ought to be, but also what children think about art and how they look at it. In that way we can guide children from school art to spontaneous art. To understand a child better, the importance of spontaneous art is quite clear.

Conclusion

"... we know from experimentation that the best seed will not grow in a dry soil while the poorest seed, when it is well cared for, may grow in a rich soil" (Viktor Lowenfeld, 1957, p.1). If we take children to be seeds and school to be soil, then parents and teachers are the gardeners. Gardeners must know which seed should be sown in what kind of soil or how the soil must be prepared for each kind of seed.

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Approaches to Teaching Literature

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ABSTRACT

The research project I took up for my Master of Education degree consisted of a curriculum package and teacher's notes for use in English literature classes in Bhutan. The project's main objective was to enhance the quality of teaching English literature in the Bhutanese schools.

As we are all aware of, the teaching of English Literature in Bhutan is based on traditional concepts and methods that are, by western standards, very dated. The project introduces teachers and students in Bhutan to more contemporary approaches to literature. The project has two main goals, which are:

- a. To broaden the range of reading practices used to study literary texts through the application of critical literacy strategies.
- b. To develop more student-centered classroom strategies through the use of group work and problem-solving approaches to literary study.

The study package is aimed at year nine (class IX) students and represents five weeks (half a term) work.

Introduction

The curriculum package is a self-contained resource dealing with "new approaches" to literature teaching. The lessons contain:

- A statement of aims and objectives related to the unit content;
- Background notes/explanations of concepts, for use with students;
- Content materials;
- Key activities that will help students learn the concepts and skills covered in the unit.

The main aim of the curriculum package is to introduce teachers and students to more contemporary approaches to literature, insofar as this is appropriate to our education system and culture. The package was prepared with the main aim of helping to broaden the range of reading practices used to study literary texts, through the application of critical literacy strategies, and to develop more student-centered classroom strategies through the use of group work and problem-solving approaches to literature study.

Views of Literature

In the past, the study of literature was based on the assumption that works of literature reflect the best ideas of the best minds, and the highest expression of human creativity. This view of literature assumes that poems and stories have clear meanings which were placed in them by the author, and which readers must find and learn to appreciate.

We are now learning that this view represents only one way of looking at literature. New approaches to the study of literature invite us all to question and challenge some of these traditional ideas. The study package introduces young readers and also most of us (teachers unfamiliar to the new ideas) to some of these new ways of reading and understanding literature.

This study aims to introduce students to three key ideas about literature. The three key ideas are as follows:

1. The first idea is that “literature” is a category of writing about which there can be much disagreement. Definitions of literature vary from time to time and place to place, which suggests that what counts as literature at a particular time is related to changing social contexts rather than reflecting eternal qualities in the works themselves.
2. The second idea is that works of literature reflect the values of the society in which they were produced, even though the author may not be aware of these values.
3. The third idea is that the meanings we find in a poem may be shaped by the readers as much as by the author. This is to say that readers do not passively take meaning from the text, but actively bring meaning to the text, though they may not be aware of doing this. This implies that different readers may perceive different meanings in a poem or other literary works, depending upon factors like their social background, their past experiences, and even their gender.

All the above mentioned ideas taken together suggest that works of literature may not have “fixed” and “correct” meanings that all people will agree upon. Basically the study package aims to encourage a more critical approach to the study of literature. It invites all Bhutanese teachers and students to challenge some of the ideas we find in poems, stories and plays and to test these ideas against their own experiences and values.

The study package focuses on the three topics:

- a. What is literature?
- b. Values derived from literature.
- c. How meaning is constructed through reading.

What is literature?

In this section, the activities are arranged in a way that students arrive at the main idea that literature is a category of writing about which there can be a lot of disagreement. Students would learn that definitions of literature vary from time to time and place to place, which suggests that what counts as literature at a particular time is related to changing social contexts rather than reflecting eternal qualities in the works themselves.

Values derived from literature

This section deals with activities that encourage students, through reading of stories and poems, to derive values depending on their cultural, personal and social

experiences and to learn how values in literature differ from place to place; person to person, depending on one's experiences and background.

How meaning is constructed through reading

These assumptions of reading could be new to us. In the past, we never really thought much about what the reading does. We first assumed that reading of a story and understanding of the writer's meaning was all that reading did. According to modern literacy theory, this is not all true. As I have already mentioned, new approaches to the study of literature encourage the reader to construct his/her own meaning or understanding of the text and not to totally accept the writer's view.

Modern critics like Jack Thomson (1993) state that literary texts are not "directly inspired artifacts dropped from the skies for our edification. Texts are constructed, made by fallible human beings, and we can all construct our own text, using the rhetoric of authors we read " (p.11).

Reading involves the readers' constructing their own meaning through using steps like filling the "gaps" and interpreting meaning as they go along filling in these gaps. A "gap" is obviously not a blank space. It may be more accurate to say that "gaps" are places in the text where connections between ideas must be made by the reader rather than the writer. Due to the fact that readers may fill these gaps or make these connections in different ways, texts are all open to a variety of readings.

These are all about the new approaches to the study or teaching of literature. It is written and explained clearly enough for readers or teachers to understand and work upon and at the same time enjoy their work using the new but definitely practical and useful methods.

The following sections contain a couple of lessons/teaching materials (to incorporate all would be unnecessarily long and time-consuming) from my curriculum package. The lessons are prepared using the approaches (already explained earlier) in contemporary literature teaching.

Lesson 1: What is Literature?

Teaching objectives:

Students learn that there is no 'fixed' definition of literature.
Students would be able to construct a definition of literature.

Resources: Comic extract from a newspaper.

What is Literature?

Towards a definition

Tell students:

Below is a list of texts for you to classify as literary and non-literary. Write your decision in the boxes.

First, fill in your own view in the column, then discuss your decision in small groups and arrive at a group decision for each item. Record this in second the column.

Finally, discuss the group decision with the teacher and record the final decision in the third column.

List	Individual	Group	Teachers
Shakespeare's Plays			
A newspaper			
An Archie comic			
A story written by a student			
Adventure stories by Enid Blyton			
An 'Amar Chitra Katha' comic			
Poems by English Poet William Wordsworth			

Discuss these points in your group:

- What were the criteria you relied on most in making your decision? (Give examples)
- Which items were the most difficult to classify? Why?
- Which items were the easiest to classify? Why?
- Is your classification similar or dissimilar to your school's or teacher's? Why?

Features of a literary work

Following is a list of features which are sometimes offered in "official" definitions of literature. How many of them appear to be similar to your own definitions about literature?

Literary works....

- Contain finely crafted language.
- Offer serious themes for consideration.
- Are imaginative and creative.
- Offer special techniques of writing.
- Offer a perceptive view of the world.
- Educate as well as entertain.
- Contain well-developed characters, ideas and situations. (Adapted from Moon 1990)

The above features are sometimes stated as defining a piece of work as "literature", but can they also be found in other kinds of writing?

Below are three pieces of writing which are clearly not works of literature in the traditional sense.

1. A newspaper
2. A comic
3. A fashion magazine.

For each text, record a tick next to the features, listed in the chart below, which might be found in the writing.

Features	TEXTS		
	1	2	3
Contains finely crafted language			
Offers serious themes for consideration			
Is imaginative and creative			
Uses special techniques of writing			
Offers a perceptive view of the world			
Educates as well as entertains.			

Can you produce a list of features which are present in all literary works but will be absent in any other type of writing?

Sit in groups and share your ideas.

Finally, read your discussions to the whole class.

Are comics Literature?

Here is a popular comic strip taken from a newspaper. Read it carefully and tick the statements you think are true. (Do this task individually).

[Comic strip]

Character

- Garfield the cat is very self-centered.
- Garfield is very aggressive.
- Garfield's owner is very self-centered.
- Garfield and his owner have a good relationship.
- Garfield and his owner have a bad relationship.
- Garfield and his owner depict modern people.
- Garfield is very lazy.

Setting (time and place)

- The incident in the comic takes place in America.
- It's a modern day story.

- It is a story from the medieval times.
- It takes place in Europe.
- It takes place in the east (India).
- It takes place while Garfield and his owner are holidaying on the moon.

Characterization (how is character revealed?)

The characters of Garfield and his owner are revealed through:

- their thoughts
- their speech
- their actions
- their appearance
- their shoes
- their clothes
- their shadows.

Discuss and compare your view in groups.

Themes in the comic strip:

Does the Garfield comic have a theme or moral?

Below is a list of themes and values the comic might suggest to readers. Rank them in order from (1) most evident to (10) least evident.

- A good relationship involves co-operation.
 - Modern life makes people self-centered.
 - You can never know what others think about you.
 - Appearances can be deceptive.
 - Anger provokes anger.
 - It's worth being aggressive.
 - Look before you leap.
 - Patience, politeness and wisdom are among the most cherished virtues.
 - Their (Garfield and his owner) story brings us face to face with the reality of human existence.
 - The story is about human feelings and relationship.
- In groups, discuss and write your results.

Now that you have read the comic, go back to the list of features of a literary text above. How many of these features could be applied to the Garfield comic also?

For Example –

Does the comic offer a theme or comment on life?

Does the comic contain well-developed characters, ideas or situation?

Here are some possible answers. Tick the ones you agree with.

1. It is not literature because it uses language 'freely'.
2. It could not be literature because it is imaginative and creative and at the same time it entertains.
3. It cannot be literature because it appears in a small section in the newspaper whereas real literary works usually appear in the form of a book.
4. It offers themes and values just like other literary works.
5. It contains finely crafted language like other literary works.

Share your ideas in a group and with the whole class.

In small groups, discuss this feature and decide which ones could apply to the comic.

Writing

Based on your discussions and activities so far, write a short paragraph defining literature. When you have done this, share your ideas with each other and with the whole class.

Lesson 2: The Highwayman

Teaching Objectives:

To show that texts contain gaps, and that meaning is not located 'in' the text..
To show that readers interact with the literary text in order to construct meaning.
To show that readers with different background knowledge might produce **different constructions** of the text.

To encourage students to challenge the idea that texts are **containers** of meaning.

Resources: "The Highway Man" by Alfred Noyes.

Starting the lesson:

Pose this question to the students:

When we read a work of literature (or any text), where does the meaning come from?

Students write down their answers. Share these in discussion, blackboard the ideas.

Activity 1

Give students this list of words to study

Hurry

Highway

Motor car

Ambulance

Hospital

(Adapted from Moon 1992)

Ask: Is it a random list of words or does it tell a story?
If you can see a story in the words, say what you think is happening.

Students write answers to these questions:

1. Where does the story take place?
2. What time of day did you imagine it is?
3. Who was in hurry? (describe their appearance, age, etc)
4. Why were they hurrying?
5. What kind of the car is the motor car?
6. Why is the ambulance needed?
7. What happens at the hospital?

Discuss answers with the students.

Discussion

Ask: How did you make a story from these words? Which of the following things did you do?

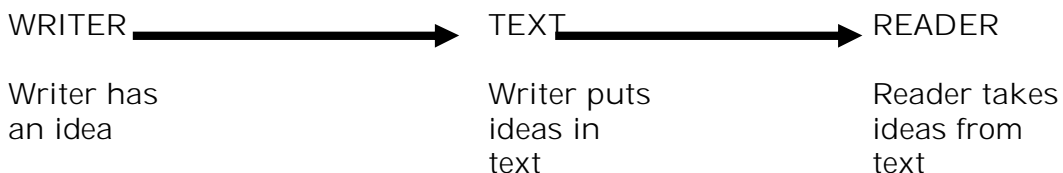
- ◆ Make connections between the words to create a plot?
- ◆ Invent characters and setting for the story?
- ◆ Image someone seeing or telling the story?

Ask: What does this tell us about how we make meaning from stories?

- ◆ That the meaning all comes from the page in front of us?
OR
- ◆ That some of the meaning is supplied by the readers?

Teacher explains

When people think about reading a story, they often imagine that the process works like this (put the diagram on board)



But this doesn't explain how readers can make a story from a list of words. It seems that readers already have lots of information about the story, even before they start reading. Discuss:

Where does this information come from?
How is it used?

Poem: The Highwayman

Tell students they are going to read a poem called 'The Highwayman'. It is a long poem that tells a story.

The poem contains the following elements:

- ◆ A highwayman, who loves a woman named Bess
- ◆ Bess, a beautiful woman
- ◆ Guns
- ◆ The king's soldiers
- ◆ Two deaths.

Activity 2

Students use these elements to make a guess about what will happen in the story.

Students write brief descriptions of what they think will happen.

Students then read their descriptions out in class, and discuss their ideas.

Students then write answers to these questions:

- ◆ What kind of man is the highwayman?
- ◆ What does he look like?
- ◆ What kind of woman is Bess?
- ◆ What does she look like?
- ◆ Where does the story take place?
- ◆ What time of day is it?
- ◆

Discuss the answers in class

Ask: Where do you think your ideas about the story have come from?

Before Reading

Here is some more background information about the poem. Give this information to students.

- ◆ The poem was written in the 1800s.
- ◆ It is a British poem, written by Alfred Noyes.
- ◆ It tells an adventurous story.

Ask: Does this information change your ideas about the poem?
Which ideas would you want to change? Why?

Reading the Poem

Teacher reads the poem to the students.

Teacher stops reading at two points:

- ◆ The beginning of part II
- ◆ The beginning of part II, Stanza V

Each time, ask students to briefly write down what they think will happen. They must keep these ideas to themselves.

Finish reading the poem.

Discussion

Ask from where they got their ideas about the story. (This question applies to all predictions, whether right or wrong).

Here are some possible answers. (Students can select answers from the list).

- From other stories that they read in the past?
- From what they know about the history and customs of Britain?
- From their own life experiences?
- From other sources? (Add these to the list).

Finding Gaps in the Text

Teacher explains: There are many pieces of information that the text does not give us. Yet readers do not seem to notice these gaps in the story.

Here are some things that the poem does not tell us:

The country in which the story takes place.
How the king's men knew where to find the Highwayman.
What role Tim the Ostler plays in the events.

Ask: How did we know these things? (Answer: they were given as background knowledge, or readers filled in these gaps on the basis of past experience).

Place students in small groups or pairs:

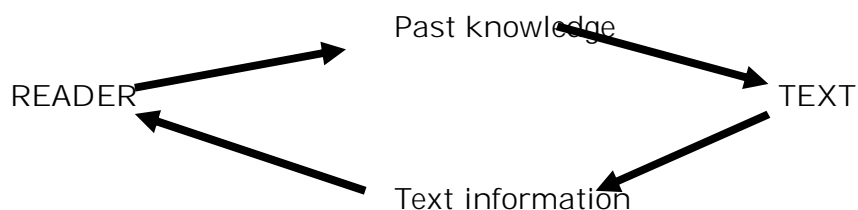
Allow 5 minutes to find other things that are not directly stated or explained in the text (that is, other 'gaps' in the text). Write these down.

After 5 minutes, ask the groups to read out their findings.
Discuss how readers are able to fill in these gaps.

How does reading work?

Teacher explains: These activities have taught us about how readers make meaning from the text. The text contains only limited information, and readers must fill in the gaps by using their own knowledge.

We can diagram the process like this:



The reader uses past knowledge to fill in gaps in the text (that is, the reader completes the story by filling in the missing details).

Different readings

Ask the question: What happens if different readers have different kinds of background knowledge and expectations of the text? Does this mean that they will make different meanings? If so, which meaning do we accept?

Activity 3

Tell students they will be given a short paragraph to read. (Prepare the paragraph on handout sheets, or on a hidden section of the blackboard).

Divide the class into two groups at random

Tell each group they will be given the title of the paragraph separately. While Group One has eyes closed, write this title on the board for Group Two:

"The Prisoner"

Erase the title.

While Group Two has eyes closed, write this title on the board for Group One:

"The Wrestler"

Erase the title.

Now, ask all students to read the passage, and write down what they think is going to happen.

Here is the passage:

"Things weren't going well. Rocky was in trouble. He was sure that the charge against him had been unfair. He didn't like being held like this. He tried to collect his thoughts and make a plan. The lock that held him was strong, but he felt that he could break it. However, his timing would have to be perfect. His success or failure could depend upon what he did in the next seconds".

(Adapted from Anderson et al., quoted in Freebody p.74).

When students have written their answers, reveal that two different titles were given for the passage.

After students have written their answers, discuss with them how the background knowledge they were given has shaped their reading of the passage.

Discussion

Ask: What different kinds of background information might these two groups of readers have:

Readers in modern day Bhutan?

Readers in 19th century Britain?

Readers who grew up in small villages?

Readers who have grown up in big cities?

Readers who have read a lot of literature?

Readers who have read mostly comics or romance stories?

By whose standards shall we measure what is to be accepted as the right reading of text?

In the lesson on "The Highwayman" the first activity is a very clear example of how readers can make meanings by taking five words and filling in gaps using their own imagination and personal experience. With those five words a reader, by filling in gaps, can actually create a short story and this is how gaps work and meaning is constructed.

From my own perspective, the project is a challenging and a potentially valuable one. Its intention is to introduce Bhutanese students to new and important theories and practices in the study of literature.

* * *

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From noisy proclamations to providing experiences: Sketches from a teacher's classroom practice.

- Dorji Thinley, NIE samtse

Need for a departure in our approach to teaching poetry

I wonder if the classroom practice of English teachers at various levels in this country indicate a passion for squeezing "themes" and "central ideas" out of literary texts - prose or poetry, often sadly at the cost of the vast literary, linguistic and aesthetic possibilities that the learners may be helped to recognize. I am not sure whether it is a habit we have inherited unconsciously from the downside of pedagogic practices in neighbouring education systems. It is hardly surprising to observe that after teaching an elegy or an ode in "great detail", even the most gifted student in the class can at best only reproduce like the myna bird the mere whys and wherefores of the text pushed down his or her throat by the teacher's noisy proclamations and "good notes".

A classroom approach that only inflates the teacher's academic ego may in the short term give one a protected sense of academic confidence and keep the hobgoblin of incompetence from tugging at the elbows now and then or prepare the students to answer 'expected questions', but it fails to spur genuine intellectual growth deep enough to instill a cultivated sense of appreciation for literature. It is time that English teachers across the kingdom took a critical look at our classroom practice and show the courage to shift from the Gradgrindian approach, as it were, that we have been heir to so long, to an approach that enlists student participation - active and involved - in the word as well as spirit of the text they read. Look at the seventh stanza of Southey's *Inchcape Rock* (taught in classes 9 & 10 in Bhutanese schools)

*Down sank the bell, with a gurgling sound,
The bubbles rose and burst around;
Quoth Sir Ralph, 'The next who comes to the Rock
Won't bless the Abbot of Aberbrothok.'*

The highly sensuous description of the situation could simply be murdered with a thud of the teacher's dry paraphrase of the lines, if the students were to be merely dictated something like this: "Alright listen! as the Abbot of Aberbrothok cuts the bell from the Inchcape float, down sinks the bell making a gurgling sound. As the bell sinks in the water, bubbles rise and burst around. Sir Ralph the Rover says to his fellowmen that whoever comes after them will no longer say words of praise to the Abbot of Aberbrothok understood?".

The stanza has in it a wealth of poetic meanings conveyed in words that can make a deep impression on the reader's mind. As such, it would be unfair on the teacher's part not to give the learners an opportunity to interact closely and very intimately with the text. If read aloud, the lines are all music to the ear; there is a consonance of sounds in "sank" and "sound", and "bubbles" and "burst", assonance of sounds in the first syllables of "bubbles" and "burst" and "Abbot" and "Aberbrothok", end rhymes in "seen" and "green", "deck" and "speck", and an impressive piece of onomatopoeia, sometimes called 'echoism' in "sank the bell", "gurgling sound", "bubbles rose" and "burst around".

I get an impression that many of us English teachers in Bhutan think that an effective rendering of a poem with accompanying gestures, facial expressions and tonal variation amounts to indulgence in histrionics before an obedient class, hence unbecoming of a teacher. My suggestion to poetry teachers whose classroom practice, even after fifteen years of teaching, has had a classic tale of disasters, is that one must cultivate from early on a fine chemistry of genuine interest, involvement and enthusiasm in the text one teaches.

Mi nyams `dris te shes// Rta nyams zhon te shes//

I have had batches of students who come to the first poetry class each semester already nauseated with feelings of qualms and worse, phobia for poetry. Some would have already decided that "Poetry is the last thing I shall teach in the school because it is scary, I shall never understand it, it is a hard nut to crack..."

I tell them, "Do not be scared of poetry, we shall go on a honeymoon with her, talk to her, listen to her, be empathic with her. Remember the Bhutanese proverb which says *'The character of a person is known by acquaintanceship and that of a horse by riding it'*?" Much as expected, many of them change their attitudes within the next two or three weeks of poetry!

Recognizing and appreciating a poem's literary and linguistic character is like trying to study the deeper qualities of a person one doesn't know much about.

During informal exchanges with secondary teachers on the pedagogic aspects of poetry I have often heard them tell me how tough and defiant poems like Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*, and even Arnold's *Dover Beach* were in the classroom! My suggestions to them have consistently been to say, "Read the poem at least ten times ... twenty times ..., why not fifty times, if you still find it cruel and unkind!" Of course, one must have a minimum of resources to refer to. It helps to remember what Einstein said: "One should never impose one's views on a problem, one should rather study it, and in time a solution will reveal itself".

Kindling the spark of poetic experience in the students is not quite easy as doing contour maps or describing potato farming at Phobjikha. It necessitates the creation of a learning context wherein students feel a direct sense of involvement with the poem. Five things emerge from my practice that have always helped me in forging an intimacy between the student's mind and the text:

- a) the value of excitement and enthusiasm on the teacher's part;
- b) the need to personalize the lesson, one way to do which is to relate the situations depicted in the poem to the student's personal experiences, emotional, social and cultural. The dry ritual of stanza-wise dissection of the text and dictating notes to suit the demands of an examination does more harm than good to learning.
- c) never dissecting a poem; look at it as I look at a person: laugh and joke with it, participate in its experience of joy and sorrow, success and failure, hope and despair, compassion and malice, adventure and idleness. In short, try to understand and appreciate its personality.
- d) preparing the ground, by which I mean arousing interest in the students by narrating an interesting event, story, personal anecdote, a story from the Kuensel, a recent box office hit from Hollywood, citing a piece of biographical

information from the poet's life, a quote from *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, the *Dhamapada*, *Words of My Perfect Master*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a couple of good (but decent!) jokes by Khushwant Singh, you name it, that I think is relevant to the poem I am going to teach. I have never felt the need to take a cow or a whole set of audio or video cassettes into the classroom as a teaching aid to motivate the learners.

- e) reading the poem with accompanying gestures, facial expression and appropriate voice and tonal variation.

Bringing alive the poem's verbal score

In my experience of teaching poetry, I have often found that a quick method which enables the class to have a direct experience of the poem's inner world is reading aloud – by way of demonstration by the teacher followed by whole-class and subsequent group and individual readings, both of which can be highly exciting for the class. In approaching a poem like *The Inchape Rock*, it is important to remember that as the verse is narrative and dramatic in form, its intrinsic qualities may not be felt if it is not read aloud! One thing I always tell the class to observe during a reading by me or by one of the students is absolute silence, so that the latter's aural engagement with the text is motivated by a strong conviction that a poem is a "composition written for performance by the human voice" and that its effect is felt only when it is brought alive to the ear through the reader's voice. This is what I would normally tell my class before I read:

- I want everybody to listen in absolute silence till I finish reading the poem;
- You must all close your eyes, take your minds off all thoughts of distraction and focus only on the words you hear from the poem (I advise the teacher not to feel offended by occasional peels of suppressed laughter, which students do sometimes!)
- After listening to my reading, I want you to quickly tell me what impression you gather from the poem; what objects/images/words/phrases had the most impact on your mind; what words, phrases, lines come to your mind and what do you think they tell you about? What do you think is the subject/main concern of this poem based on the general impression you got from my reading?

Normally, I am glad to receive as many different responses as there are students in the class. The more diverse the responses, the better! It informs me of the varied intellectual and emotional orientations that exist among the class. Reading without the printed text should be followed by a reading that involves a simultaneous engagement of eye and ear and the whole class repeating after the teacher. This is how I instruct: "Say the poem after me. Observe my gestures, facial expressions and especially the variation in my voice and tone ...

The latter two qualities help to convey the mood and intensity of feelings described". Students find this exercise quite thrilling and animating as it provides an opportunity to read a poem in the manner of a song without the embarrassing experience of being observed by peers! It is not only fun but is also a quick source of motivation for students who are generally shy and reticent. One point I always tell my students regarding reading is to be aware that individual performances in front of peers, if done coercively, can cause a lot of anxiety and tension for some students, which can sow the seeds of apathy towards the subject. It can cause permanent damage to the

student's innate ability to appreciate literature! I still recall the repugnance I felt towards Maths as a result of my teacher's insensitivity and cruel ways. Therefore, reading exercises, wherever relevant, must be carried out in whole-class and group situations first, so that students develop the necessary confidence for individual performances.

"Remember", I caution, "never to read a poem for more than five minutes at a stretch unless you have a proven ability to read with extraordinary effectiveness!" It may not be very stressful for the class to close their eyes and listen attentively to a poem of seventeen quatrains like Southey's *The Inchcape Rock*, which, read at normal speed, should take not more than three minutes. There are a few things I invariably tell the class to remember in making reading lively, interesting and meaningful:

- Use of appropriate facial expressions;
- Accenting certain syllables, words and phrases in the poem as the mood and tone demand;
- Varying the level of voice and tone;
- Use of effective gestures where necessary;
- Controlled speed and appropriate pauses.

The reader's voice alone will not sufficiently communicate the emotional content of the poem; a good dose of action for dramatic effect, especially in respect of dramatic and narrative poetry surely enhances the poem's appeal. This is best done when the teacher's reading is accompanied by appropriate gestures. The atmosphere described in the first seven stanzas of Southey's *The Inchcape Rock*, for instance, is pervaded by a refreshing sense of calm, serenity, peace and tranquility. The fusion of aerial serenity and the serenity prevailing on the surface of the sea can be conveyed quite vividly through a simultaneous use of voice, facial expression and gestures. Of course, it takes some amount of courage and willingness on the teacher's part to do that. Going the extra mile is in my experience never a problem if the teacher has cultivated the energies essential to teaching literature – a genuine sense of excitement, enthusiasm and involvement.

Sense of alienation in the Bhutanese classroom

If presented through the long-accepted method of teacher bombast, a poem like Southey's *The Inchcape Rock* can create a brutal sense of cultural distance in the Bhutanese classroom, as many of the poem's nautical images are outside the student's cultural experience. A writer's choice of poetic diction is directly influenced by the cultural character of the material she/he writes. Hence, it is important to remember that while the themes, ideas and values implied in the poem may have an element of universality, the language used to reproduce human experiences as presented in the narrative is often highly culture-specific. The teacher must, therefore, be sensitive about the cultural content of the text being read.

For an average Bhutanese student many of the nautical terms in the poem like "sails", "keel", "buoy", "deck" and the like are simply extraneous. In my classroom practice, I have often found that much of the dreadful sense of cultural estrangement of poetry can be reduced through the effective use of visuals, particularly chalkboard sketches and picture posters.

For the teacher, it again means going the extra mile, as it requires doing something outside the routine minimum. I have always lamented my own inability to draw on the chalkboard even a simple object such as a pencil with any sense of proportion to

explain concepts culturally distant from the student's experience. But in time, I realized that I could exploit the artistic talents that students bring to class but which often "rust unburnished". So when the class gives me a stupefied gaze ready to grudge in silence my inability to show them what I mean by "When the rock was hidden by the surges' swell" or "Down sunk the bell, with a gurgling sound ...", I should be able to invite a student who can do a quick sketch of the 'Inchcape Rock' on the chalkboard following my instructions. The sketch may be crude without much visual appeal, but it explains the concept much more effectively than the teacher's loud, abstract pronouncements!

The same student or even a group of students may be assigned to draw the 'Inchcape Rock' with water colours or crayons on a piece of chart. With clear, specific instructions by the teacher, one shouldn't be surprised if excellent picture posters are brought to the class by the students, which may be used as convenient aids to teach *The Inchcape Rock* pictorially.

Vocabulary through poetry

It doesn't take one day, not even an afternoon, either at home or in the staff-room to write the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases on a piece of chart for ready display or have them typed and distributed as handout for each student. The only resources one would need to do this are a good dictionary, preferably Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a piece of chart paper and a marker-pen/sketch-pen.) My preference has been to make handouts for each student or groups of students in the class.

Poetry offers immense opportunity for learning vocabulary. Look at the ones explained below. Terms such as "perilous rock", "buoy", "surges", "swell", "mariners", "mirth", "plague", "haze", "gale", "knell" all have practical utility in the student's day-to-day communicative acts.

There are a few things I consider the essential elements of my classroom practice:

- Write the meanings of words and phrases that I think are not familiar to the class with the help of a good dictionary;
- See that the meanings provided are in the context of the poem under study (because a word has multiple meanings often numbered serially in the dictionary; so be careful not to choose the wrong definition.)
- Give the class a few minutes to practise the vocabulary learnt. Ask students individually to read or say their sentences to the class. (I have found that it is among the activities students consider exciting).
- Remember in the subsequent classes to ask the definitions again.
- Tell them always "to use the vocabulary learnt with the people you talk to". (I have often heard students proudly say, "Yes sir, I have used the word "munificence" ... "peril" ... when I talked to Yangzon yesterday in the dining hall". For a teacher to hear from a student that she/he is practising what is learnt in class is no little satisfaction.
- Let the students guess the contextual meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases in the poem, and let them write the definitions on their own as homework.

But a certain aspect of our practice has often bothered me. I have observed that the words and phrases and their definitions written on charts and handouts often lack grammatical consonance with each other. For instance, a word is written in the

present continuous tense whereas its meaning is given in the simple present tense; or, a word has the function of a noun as used in a poem, whereas its meaning as written on the chart or handout is a verb.

Lets look at an example from *The Inchcape Rock*. The dictionary also defines the words "deck" and "buoy" as "hit" and "keep afloat" respectively to indicate their grammatical function as verbs; but since their grammatical function in the context of the poem is that of nouns, the definitions we present to the class should be appropriate to those grammatical functions, as "a platform in a ship that serves as a floor" and "an anchored float serving as a navigation mark or to show reefs" respectively. If not done correctly, it could be a serious problem because students are then taught to use new vocabulary in the wrong grammatical context. A typical handout for word definitions in respect of Southey's *The Inchcape Rock* should look like this:

The Inchcape Rock: Words and phrases explained

Inchcape Rock: a sandstone reef in the North Sea, off the mouth of the river Tay in Scotland.

Perilous Rock: the dangerous Inchcape Rock (dangerous for the sailors)

Inchcape Bell: a bell-buoy equipped a warning bell rung by the motion of the sea. The bell was installed on the Inchcape Rock by the abbot of Aberbrothok to signal imminent danger.

Buoy: an anchored float serving as a navigation mark or to show reefs, etc.

Surges' swell: the swell of the waves at sea; a heavy forward or upward motion of the sea waters.

Mariners: seamen, sailors.

Deck: a platform in a ship that serves as a floor.

Rover's Mirth: the merriment and laughter of the sea robbers or pirates.

Plague: to cause trouble or difficulty to somebody/something.

Inchcape float: the buoyant object that floats on the surface of the sea and is tied to the Inchcape Bell.

Sinking beneath the tide: refers to the sinking of the ship in the periodic rise and fall of the seawater.

Haze: obscuration of the atmosphere near the earth by fine particles of water, smoke or dirt.

Gale: as storm at sea; a very strong wind.

Knell: the sound of a bell rung slowly after a death or at a funeral.

Gurgling sound: bubbling sound of water caused by the sinking of an object.

Our classroom approach to this subject has largely been to beat good poetry into the ground with cheap bazaar "Gems" complemented very well by our penchant for thematic analysis and dictating answers to "expected questions", a disease that has entrenched itself so deeply into our classroom habits. In a highly examination-driven system of education like ours, it is perhaps a bit unfair and a little too early to expect English teachers to make models of Keats' *Nightingale* or Southey's *Inchcape Rock* or enact a scene from Walt Whitman's *O Captain, My Captain* or Alfred Noyes' *The Highwayman*. But it may not be very unfair to think that a teaching methodology that deprives the students of the immense opportunities of fun, excitement, wonder and intellectual inquiry that the study of poetry provides should be recognized as classroom vice.

From Stage to Page:

Using Improvisational Acting to Cultivate Confidence in Writers

-Adar Cohen

Improvisational Acting is a creative, unrehearsed artistic medium that addresses life's truths through self-expression and mindful teamwork. It is whimsical, raw, and very alive. Actors work together to establish believable scenes, characters, and conflicts with honesty and humor. As an avid Improv actor and a practicing writing tutor, I have noticed some stunning parallels between Improvisation and the primary, written method of communication. Everyone has been daunted by writing, by the infinite opportunities to communicate. Will the writer clarify, simplify, complicate, decorate, explain, make plain, interpret, persuade, profess, or digress? The magnitude of these decisions can weigh down the fingertips of even the most prolific authors. What about writers who lack confidence? Improvisational Acting has the ability to create and foster more confident writers, and writing teachers can be the practitioners who instigate and guide this potentially rich process.

It is safe to say that most reluctant writers are not boisterous jokesters. Many students will feel uncomfortable playing Improv games at first, and many teachers will be hesitant to initiate this delicate process. We should try to push through the unease, recognizing it as both a cause of the student writer's difficulties and an authentic emotion that should not be ignored. We must walk this tightrope with sensitivity and resolve. Unless the student is genuinely petrified, the show must go on. The discomfort is part of the medicine. Hiding behind ambiguity, wordiness, and self-censure is comfortable. Pushing through bad habits and working hard to form new ones cannot be a comfortable process.

The game *Actually* is usually played with two people. The actors create a scene and engage in dialogue, which can be interrupted at any point by the bell. When it rings, the actor must change the last thing he has said, and continue to do so until the bell and its ringer are satisfied. The following round of *Actually* excavated some precious ideas and revealed a gem of personal experience.

Me: "So, what are ways that you could develop this paragraph?"

Tutee: "Well, I could talk about the ways that children avoid their parents. --(ding!)-- I could...talk about the way children stick together and drift away from their parents."

Me: "That sounds interesting. What else?"

Tutee: "I could mention how some kids move out before they are 18 --(ding!)-- I could mention how very few kids move out before they are --(ding!)-- I could talk about how I moved out before I was 18."

Me: "Wow. Is that true?"

Tutee: "Yeah, that's why I am interested in this topic --(ding!)-- that's why I want to write about this topic --(ding!)-- that's why I want to prove that teenagers can make it on their own."

Improv slips through the fingers of those who try to define it. Its amorphous, transformative nature evades any attempt to classify it as a theatre sport, as

psycho-drama, or as impromptu comedy. However, these circumstances have not discouraged people from dipping their hands into the water and trying to grasp the slippery art form. Viola Spolin, author of the first authoritative book on the subject, Improvisation for the Theater, called it “a moment in the lives of people without needing a plot or story line for the communication.”ⁱ Greg Atkins, accomplished actor and Improv guru, offers another definition. He emphasizes “the freedom of improvisation—no script, no director, nothing but a group of actors creating relationships, conflicts, dialogue, plot, songs...off the top of our heads.”ⁱⁱ Why is it that writers lack the confidence to do the same?

What evil forces have instilled apprehension in today’s writers? How has self-doubt become an epidemic? How have vagueness and inappropriate neutrality become such common vices? Why does “the academy” encourage the composition of ornate bouquets that choke the clarity out of students’ writing? These are legitimate challenges that writers of all abilities must face.

In The Confident Writer, Constance Gefvert outlines four of the major reasons why writing demands so much confidence. First, writing is not as natural as speaking. We talk every day and we learned how to do so long before we articulated any of our thoughts on paper. Second, writers have “no immediate audience” to give instant and continuous feedback. Third, unlike writing, speaking “is usually tentative.” The idea that writing is permanent and irrevocable is yet another source of anxiety that diminishes confidence. Fourth, while we converse freely on any subject that pleases us, writing in the workplace and in schools is often “assigned.” Limiting a writer’s topic to assigned drudgery will only suffocate a spirit of confidence and creativity.ⁱⁱⁱ

But obstacles to writing with confidence are not impossible to overcome. The following are some concrete examples of how Improv games can be used in a writing class. It is my hope that they will assist writers in seizing their self-assurance and releasing their anxieties. Each of the examples will begin with a brief diagnosis of the writing concern, followed by a description of a particular game and an analysis of the game’s ability to address the concern in question.

Apprehensive writers are often reluctant “to commit themselves to a position.” They dodge this necessity by “embracing neutrality” and, unfortunately, “by saying less.”^{iv} Donald Daiker attributes these weaknesses to the harmful effects of exclusively negative criticism. If students are to recover from the ruthless effects of the red pen, Daiker notes that praise from teachers and professors is vital for “students who have known little encouragement...”^v A crucial principle of Improv is the renunciation of destructive criticism. Praise is the protocol and is supplemented only by constructive, encouraging evaluation. Improvisational Acting has the ability to lure timid writers out of hiding by providing an environment where only one simple demand is made: that they say *something*.

The game that best persuades reluctant writers to emerge from their timidity is *Word Ball*. In this game, the group stands in a circle facing each other and one person begins by throwing the imaginary ball to another player and calling out a random word. The actor who receives the ball and the word must mime a catch and immediately throw a new word, triggered by the previous one, to another actor. This process continues, and the pauses between catches and throws should become shorter and shorter until the team achieves a level of fluidity.

Word Ball taps into the phenomenon of free-association and encourages the unrestrained generation of ideas. This game can be used with students who have

difficulty generating creative alternatives to mundane words that congest their writing. *Word Ball* affirms the value of the student's ideas. If they are zany, that's good. If they clarify, that's great. If they are unique, honest, and appropriate to the piece, save them; they're priceless. This game may not put all students at ease, but they will get used to it. And the results are worth it.

Writers who lack confidence make harsh judgments of their writing. These frustrated, pessimistic decrees usually sound something like: "I don't feel that I'm being successful with this assignment,"^{vi} or "it might be kind of dumb."^{vii} Improv replaces these self-conscious tendencies with a liberal reverence for any creative effort.

Reticent writers can benefit from *One-Word Story*. This game is played with as few as two people or as many as twenty. For a large group, the actors sit in a circle; if only two people are playing, they should sit facing each other. The participants tell a story together, alternating one word at a time. The story shouldn't be complicated. The establishment and resolution of a conflict and the clear presence of a beginning, a middle, and an end are the only requirements. *One-Word Story* sharpens an actor's ability to move a storyline forward, organize his ideas, and vocalize his thoughts quickly and with assurance. Why wouldn't it do the same for a writer?

Many writers have snuffed out their flames of confidence by worrying about insignificant aspects of their writing. They are so preoccupied with mechanics, grammar, and spelling that they miss the precious opportunity to "engage, soar, create, discover..."^{viii} Improv does not permit the writer to miss these opportunities.

Sound-Ball enforces this policy. It is played exactly like *Word-Ball* except that instead of random words, the actors throw and catch spontaneous sounds. Teachers can use this game to help students overcome the anxieties that smother confidence. Since generating nonsense noises in a discursive, academic context is unconventional, even unheard of, this game has the potential to cure writers of their writing fears. But if the student is completely uneasy about playing this game, we can drop it. Torturing students is counterproductive: it doesn't help them write better papers and it certainly doesn't promote increased confidence.

Apprehensive writers will readily criticize themselves for neglecting phantom expectations. Ninety-nine percent of the students who work with me make frequent criticism of their writing their standard operating procedure. Nobody thinks they "did it right" and everyone is fairly certain that "it's not very good." At the core of Improvisational Acting lies an absolute disregard for what is "right." What if the same ideology were applied to writing? What if hesitant writers didn't condemn their writing *during* the writing process? What if they could abandon the crippling effects of self-censure before they wrote a single word? The results would be magnificent.

Gibberish Ball resembles *Word-Ball* and *Sound-Ball*. But instead of words or sounds, whimsical imitations of foreign, if not otherworldly, languages roll off the actors' tongues. The ball is thrown and caught as the players try to outdo each other's vocal concoctions.

Jason: *Harf zadi ya goozidi.*

Me: *Chap chap negah miconie negah eyala jangas.*

Jason: *Bad bacti cap cheke yusef.*

Me: *Ani akanes bobo col ha koach.*

This game is perfect for the writer who has the tendency to deem her ideas wrong or inadequate. How can gibberish be wrong? Like other Improv games, *Gibberish Ball* salutes any creative effort and ignores the typical concerns: *Is it boring? Is it all over the place? How will it sound? Did I even do it right?* Some of these concerns are important elements of the writing process, but they become destructive when they dictate, dominate, manipulate, and subdue. *Gibberish Ball* can keep them in check by resuscitating the breath of creativity when it gets restricted.

Here is an example, taken from my own experiences of tutoring, that illustrates the wonders Improv can work. In this case the accomplishment was modest: a simple substitution of one word.

Alexis brought me a draft of the proposal she was writing for an environmental work camp in Brazil during her winter break. She was concerned with her overuse of certain words and her supposed inability to replace them. "I can't come up with better ones," she explained, "and I get so frustrated!" Her proposal's introduction was engaging. She described the reactions she had received when she told people that she had spent her summer at a work camp: *I wonder how many crazy looks I received.* Per order of Alexis, *crazy* had to go. We played *Word Ball*. Two things were clear: the game had enormous consciousness-tapping potential, and it would be a considerable challenge for Alexis, who is shy and easily embarrassed. I began, throwing *crazy* at Alexis. She froze, smiled, and threw back *my mom*. It wasn't quite what we were after, but I continued. *Bizarre*. She paused again before protesting, "I don't see how this is supposed to work." I considered dropping it but decided to give it one last chance. "Just one more try," I pleaded casually. *Bizarre*.

Alexis: *Unique*.

Me: *Unusual*.

Alexis: *Strange*.

Me: "What do you think? Does that work?"

The sentence in question was modified from *I wonder how many crazy looks I received* to *I wonder how many strange looks I received*.

This small adjustment was a big step forward for Alexis; she had overcome her frustration, and she was happy with her introduction.

Improv boosts confidence by stimulating creativity and undermining self-criticism. Writing teacher with and without Improv experience can try these and other games with their students. But how else can this theoretical relationship be propelled into practice? How can the relationship's potential be harnessed?

Workshops on both art forms could blend a bit of each other into their programs. Writing experts could incorporate Improv into their teaching and vice-versa. Appropriate English and Theater courses at colleges and universities could be departmentally linked to enhance the education of students studying Writing or Improv. What if more opportunities to improvise were offered to high school, middle school, and elementary school students? What if they were granted the opportunity to experiment with and explore this fascinating realm of spontaneous, interactive theater as they developed their writing skills? Again, the results would be magnificent.

Both arts begin with a blank canvas: a stage or a page. Wild vivid brush strokes blend with softer, subtle accents to paint a story. Soon the canvas is alive with color, texture, and meaning. The painting is no longer a canvas but a reality that provokes laughter, tears, illumination, dialogue. This painting becomes a portrait of the creator, and if she

watches closely and searches deeply, her confidence will emerge from the chaos of the once-blank canvas.

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How to Use TV, Video and Movies to Promote Reading

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If you seem not to get your child interested in reading or listening to stories, you might try some of these techniques:

1. Check at the video store for video materials based on children's books.
2. If your child enjoys the video, introduce him to the books.
3. Read the book together, comparing and contrasting the book and the video.
4. If your child seems intrigued by a particular character or animal (like the elephants in the *Jungle Book* movie) take him to the library and look for children's books about related subjects.
5. Reinforce a favourite book with a video. For example, both the books *There's a Nightmare in My in Closet* and video are excellent.
6. Take your children to see new children's movies that are based on books. Follow-up with the book.
7. See if there are books related to your child's favourite TV shows.
8. Watch your child's television viewing habits to get ideas of his or her special interests (like sports, adventure, science) and find books related to them.
9. If your child is a reluctant reader but an enthusiastic fan, get him books about the popular young singers and actors he or she likes.

Tips

It's a good idea to preview the video and read reviews of the movies before your child sees them.

Ask other parents for suggestions of good videos, movies, and books.

Related information:

- Bookstores
- Libraries

Reading is important for everybody in order to cope with the new knowledge in the changing world of technology. The importance and necessity of reading will hopefully continue to increase in the years to come.

However, the number of those who know how to read but do not read enough is also increasing. There are still some people, young and old, who cannot get access to reading activities and reading programmes at all and some people who are able to read do not get access to such activities and programmes. They neither have much initial

interest nor lasting interest in books and reading. The habit of reading has to be inculcated and promoted from an early age.

Many developing countries have been launching extensive literacy campaigns, in the sense of teaching people to write and to read. But knowledge of characters and reading techniques alone are not sufficient to develop real reading societies. People should be motivated to read and informed of how to utilize reading materials to improve their own personality and their social environment. In this context, the role of non-government organizations, government sectors, libraries, school and family are very important for mutual cooperation to promote reading habits among readers. The role of libraries is particularly critical as they very important institutions as information centres and life-long educational agencies.

Factors affecting reading habits in Bhutan

By and large, ours is not a reading society, but an oral society. The cultural habit of our people is more susceptible to listening and chatting than reading. It is quite common to see people very often discussing about several things that neither appeared on TV nor in newspapers. In short, our society still depends on their oral information rather than written one.

The management of 3 M's: man, money and management strategies: still poses some serious obstacles.

- Inadequate or non-existent libraries, public libraries, school libraries or special libraries.
- Insufficiency or shortage of books and reading materials for public or student's use.
- Insufficiency or shortage of educated library management expertise and human resource.
- Inadequacy of budget to provide for and support library activities and readership.

Roles of local institutions and organizations in helping libraries conduct reading promotion activities:

The task of positive reading interest to foster a love for reading will promote a reading culture and society. All concerned parties, national institutes or private sectors should work together. All efforts should be coordinated to achieve the goal.

Role of family

Parents are clearly the most important socializing agents. Parents who spend time reading to their children give them the best possible road to literacy. Many research studies have pointed out that children who do well in literacy skills are those who come from homes where there are books, where they spend time reading to their children and where children see their parents and older siblings engage in reading activities.

Roles of Libraries and Librarians

Librarians should help develop among the readers a pleasant and positive attitude towards reading. The pleasant and positive attitude of the reader should be developed first before someone is able to automatically form the habit of reading and love reading

books. The principal function of the librarian is educational. Librarians have a responsibility and an opportunity to go out and tell the public what they have in their libraries and find out what they want to read, keep building the resources set-up of the library to encourage readers to stay and browse.

Suggested programmes for promoting reading:

1. Book-based Programme

The information contained in the list should be sufficient to allow for the books to be found in the library and a mere listing of authors and title will always need to be supported either by a brief descriptive note on each book to indicate its particular value or the arrangement of the list under headings which will give such an indication. Inclusion in the list should be selective.

2. Reading Programmes

Reading programmes provide an incentive to some children to read books they might otherwise not try. The following are some effective methods for conducting reading programmes:

i) Reading Camp

This programme aims at exposing the reader to the various skills in speed reading, and in information handling. Various activities with local writers and film shows, as well as slides could be carried out.

ii) Reading Contest

This programme aims to accelerate the reading habit among the younger generation by the use of libraries considering it as a potential one in nation-building. The contest material could be a number of books on literature: prose and poetry, selected by National Committees. The participants will be required to develop and deliver some book abstracts.

iii) Book Talk

A cost-effective strategy with ability to reach a wide audience is book talk. The schools can hold book talks and book reporting sessions could be carried with the librarian's cooperation.

iv) Read aloud to children

If the child is too old to talk to, she is old enough to read too. Most critical task during this early stage is learning how to calm the child, not to bring it under control. By 9 months, the child was able to respond to the sight of certain books and convey to her parents that these were her favourite. By age five, she had taught herself to read. Fairy tales offer us an excellent opportunity to introduce the child or class to comparative literature.

v) Creative poetry

The rule for retaining the developing love for poetry in children is: reading it aloud; reading it often; keeping it simple; keeping it joyous or spooky (ghost) or exciting. Poetry sets an excellent medium for training the disciplines of listening and reading that are such integral parts of a reading programme. It must be read for word "because it is bound by meter and rhythm; every word and every syllable counts."

Picture Book

Start with picture books and build to storybooks and novels. Picture books can be read easily to children widely separate in age. Novels, however pose a problem. Make sure the child can see the pictures easily.

Story Hours

Story telling is one of the easiest activities to organize. Traditional tales or short stories of the same type are the easiest to use. Apart from these, myths, legends, fairy tales, stories about animals, things which appeal to the sense of wonder and sense of humor that stimulate the imagination and spirit of adventure are the most suitable.

Performances: Dramatic Activities:

Drama groups need careful organizing and adequate space. The approach is to outline a theme, based on a story or part of a book, which can then, by the cooperation of the children and the person in charge, be demonstrated in a dramatic form, each child undertaking and improving a role.

Puppets

Presentation of a performance based on a story or episode from a book. For both the puppeteers and audience of other children, it will extend the awareness of the story and the book on which it is based.

Competitions: Quiz:

The quiz is aimed at encouraging students to read beyond their textbooks in school, promoting books as a source of information and promoting books themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to decide precisely what the purpose of the quiz is in each competition. Book quizzes can be done just for fun. They may be set up at various class levels.

* * *

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THE CLASS: A VIBRANT HETEROGENEITY

- Jose. K.C., NIE, Paro.

By having been an altar boy, the author recalls the parable of the Sower, a great pedagogue of yore, Jesus told his listeners. Some seeds of the Sower fell on the rock – they sprouted fast, but withered soon. Some fell close to the footpath – either the birds picked up and ate them or they were trampled down. Still some others fell among thistles and thorns, which not long before choked the growing saplings. The few that fell on the tilled soil grew up unhindered and produced good yield.

One cannot but feel the resounding significance of this parable in the teaching profession. First, there is the unmistakable analogy between the Sower and the teacher. Second, there is the parallelism between the four kinds of soil where the seeds fell and the different personalities of students in whom the same material being taught falls.

As a teacher gains experience, he finds the riveting fact that only a part of his class has the well-tilled soil or caliber to receive the seeds of knowledge or skills or values imparted by the Sower, the teacher. Some students are quick receivers like the moist rock in the parable. But they have short-lived interest and no sustaining power. So, the education imparted withers too soon. Another group of students does receive education, But so many distracters in life such as bad friends, glare of modernism and laziness etc. pick away the seeds. The fourth group also gets seeds of education. But thistles in life such as domestic problems, monetary constraints, loss of parents and so on stifle the proper growth of education. The conclusion now is irresistible - the class is a vibrant heterogeneity.

Now, the author would like to share his experience of this heterogeneity he has had down the years. Before that, a few hypotheses have to be made.

Hypotheses

1. The application of the Biblical classification to students in a class facilitates fruitful teacher-learner interaction.
2. Students in a class differ widely in creativity in proportion to their socio-economic conditions, educational background of the family and their ambitions etc.
3. Gender is not a significant variable in the achievement - heterogeneity in a class.
4. A class is interestingly heterogeneous with gifted achievers and gifted underachievers.

The author now would analyze the students he had studied in his career, as shown below:

Students (actual names withheld)	Class	School	Year	Characteristics
1.Sonam Wangmo	VIII	Shaba Jr.H. School	1995	Rock (Biblical allusion)
2.Langa Wangchuk				With thorns & thistles(do)
3.Norbu Tshewang				Well-tilled soil (do)
4.Tshering Lhaba				Footpath (do)
1.Sangay Phuntsho	X	Drukgyel H. School	1997	Ascendant, irritable - <i>gifted underachiever (GU)</i>
2.Sonam Wangmo				Gloomy, withdrawn, tough-minded-ambitious, has good socio-economic status, has sound educational background for the family - <i>gifted achiever(GA)</i>
3.Drukpa Tenzin				Cheerful, placid, casual, has good socio-economic.....family- GA
4.Ghalley				Plans but is casual, has good socio-economic status, has sound educational background for the family- <i>GU</i>
5.Tenzin Phurba				Has balanced perception about parents, ambitious, has good socio-economic status, has sound educational background for the family -GA
6. Yangki				Critical, lethargic, has indefinite ambition, low educational background for the family - <i>ordinary.</i>
7.Lam Chencho				Placid, withdrawn, not earnest, not very ambitious, casual - <i>ordinary</i>
8.Dema Wangmo				Responsible, but has low ambition, often disturbed by domestic problems- <i>ordinary</i>
1.Jigme Pem	XII	Drkgyel H.School	2001	Casual, solitary- <i>GU</i>
2.Tsewang Zam				Tender-minded, practical - <i>GU</i>
3.Thewang Tashi				Sociable, active, practical, responsible - <i>GA</i>
4.Tan Palmo				Placid, accepting, cheerful, responsible- <i>GA</i>
5.Kaka Zam				Active, reflective, responsible - <i>GU</i>

6.Choda Jambay				Active, practical, irritable, critical - <i>GU</i>
7.Ugyen Chunki	XII	Drkgyel H.School	2001	Placid, accepting, withdrawn, casual- <i>GU</i>
8.Kesang Yanki				Solitary, withdrawn, lethargic - <i>ordinary</i>
9.Sitamaya				Cheerful and practical but solitary- <i>ordinary</i>

All the three student-clusters above are the representative samples of the respective classes. Only four students (out of the 44) are taken from the Class VIII of Shaba Jr. High School (old name) in order to show the sample of the Biblical heterogeneity. The eight students (out of the 33) from Class X and the nine students (out of the 40) from Class XII are shown in their personality and biographical attributes. Of the eight in Class X, three are identified as 'gifted achievers' (GA), two as 'gifted underachievers'(GU) and three as 'ordinary pupils'. Of the nine in Class XII, two are termed GA, five as GU and two as 'ordinary pupils'.

The above grouping needs further clarification. The descriptors such as *ascendant, cheerful, placid and irritable* etc. are personality traits as the teacher-author observed them for a minimum period of two years. The descriptors such as *ambition, educational background of the family* and so on speak of the biographical elements in the pupil's life. According to a study by Bhoodev Singh¹ of Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, the biographical factors (nurture) play a more remarkable role than the personality factors (nature) on a pupil's creativity. This writer's findings confirm this. The creativity of Sonam Wangmo, Drukpa Tenzin, Ghalley and Tenzin Phurba (in terms of, to quote Singh again, "verbal fluency, verbal flexibility and verbal originality," for instance) testifies to this pre-dominance of nurture over nature.

It is also an interesting fact that gender is not a major factor in achievements in a class -low, average or high - in different subjects or skills. With the help of enough statistical data, Ved Prakash and Saroj Pandey² assert that of the three demographic variables viz. gender, area and social category, the latter alone influences pupils' achievements.(Page 42 of the Indian Educational Review, January, 1996). Again, Sanjay K. Das in his paper, *Creativity and Gender Differences Among Collegiates* says : "...In other words, boys are equally creative like girls and vice versa." (*Ibid*, p.143). Simply put, it can be safely concluded that gender does not contribute much to the heterogeneity of the class.

But the two groups of gifted students do contribute to the vibrant heterogeneity. Dr Mohammad Ahmed Khan³ in his paper, *Gifted Achievers and Underachievers* portrays and contrasts the gifted achievers with the gifted underachievers.

Sangay Phuntsho, for instance, was a creative, intelligent, resourceful student. But he was, to quote Dr. Khan, "frivolous, self-indulgent, fickle....". True to Dr. Khan's findings, Sangay had guilt proneness tendencies as this writer noticed in him. So was Jigme Pem. This does not mean that all the gifted underachievers possess the above weaknesses. The following table contains a few descriptors (of course, culled from Dr. Khan) that might help teachers to identify the two gifted groups.

<i>Gifted achievers</i>	<i>Gifted underachievers</i>
Persistent, emotionally disciplined, self-assured, optimistic, devoted, realistic, determined, enthusiastic, adaptable; have high socio-economic status.	Troubled, anxious, pessimistic, easy-going; they often neglect the duty to others, avoid risks, often face contrary, opposite pulls.

Conclusion

Then, here (in the class) is God's plenty, the variety and the heterogeneity. In short, the teacher is in the middle of a spectrum of throbbing heterogeneity. Accepting and understanding, recording and studying this spectrum are the sacred tasks a teacher should do, if he/she be given the freedom and time to do them. The teacher can record this spectrum in a "microdata" of his/her students' strengths and weaknesses. It is this "microdata" (a register, for example) that will be his/her springboard for the great pedagogical action of moulding the child.

The foregoing brief treatment of the author's raw data and observations validate the four hypotheses made some brief creative pangs ago.

* * *

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¹ Bhoodev Singh, Some Psycho-Social Factors as Predictors of Creativity, *Indian Educational Review*, January, 1996, NCERT, New Delhi.

² Ved Prakash and Saroj Pandey, Influence of Demographic Variables on Learners' Achievement, *Indian Educational Review*, January 1996, NCERT, New. Delhi.

³ Dr.Mohammad Ahmed Khan, Gifted Achievers and Underachievers, *Indian Educational Review*, July 1996, NCERT, New Delhi.

* The Bible, St. Luke, 8: 4-8

English Language in Bhutan: a view on issues related to its standard and grammar teaching.

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Abstract

Of late, public opinion regarding the drastic deterioration in the standard of written English amongst the younger generation of educated Bhutanese is gaining momentum. Comments are passed and concerns expressed not only by parents, community and teachers at large, but also by some high government officials. Can it be true that even university graduates are unable to write grammatically error-free English, let alone others? While some of the comments and concerns may be valid, such allegations can be dismissed as carrying no authentic, documented evidences to support them.

Researches are now underway by Education Department's newly created Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD), and until some concrete findings are published for public scrutiny, sweeping generalizations from different sections of the Bhutanese society may have to be taken with a pinch of salt, for, while it is true that the standard is dwindling, on what parameters is the opinion based? Or for that matter, what are the existing parameters for measuring the standard of written English in Bhutan?

Interestingly, some younger Bhutanese are instantaneously dismissive of such comments and concerns. They are often heard passing remarks to the effect that:

"This is just another stereotyped obsession amongst the early-educated Bhutanese who are quick to compare and say:
...during our time, we used to write such and such English at such and such a level; today you are not able to write the same thing at that level; the standard has definitely declined..."

Some teachers that I randomly spoke to, were bold enough to state:
Oldies claim that they could write grammatically correct English at comparatively lower levels, following the structural, prescriptive methods of teaching and drills. What about their spoken English? Could they speak with equal proficiency at the same levels? Today's children can speak much better and fluently too at lower levels, following communicative teaching approach. Is what is lost in written English not being compensated for by what is gained in the spoken?

The second comment regarding spoken English appears to be valid, although written and spoken communications are not comparable in the strict sense of the term. If this opinion is valid, where then is the source of this paradoxical gap - that the standard of written communication having declined, it has resulted in an improvement in verbal communication?

Another argument that can be advanced is: should the English language usage be purely grammatically un-erroneous or should it serve merely the communicative function for a people whose mother tongue is not English? If the so-called standard English is referred to as "written English with accurate grammatical structures, and if the expectation of all is that a pupil at a certain level of schooling ought to be able to write English with a certain minimum proficiency, should teachers revert to teaching of grammar using the

prescriptive, structural approach, as it used to be done in the past? (Because at some point in time, during the process of modernizing our teaching-learning methodologies, grammar was discouraged to be taught using the traditional methods!).

Or should the 'contextual method' be allowed free play to remedy the situation? If grammar is to be taught formally in its purely structural form, how much to teach and what teaching-learning strategies to use, if not the traditional approaches? More pertinently, what are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching grammar 'un-incidentally' to both the teacher and the taught? For, occasionally, Bhutanese English teachers are fairly or unfairly accused of 'dreading' teaching grammar, for reasons not explored. Is this comment justifiable on any concrete ground?

This paper, besides answering some of the aforementioned queries, attempts to explore literature on the various aspects of language in general and grammar in particular, and consequently sheds some light on the issues and concerns pertaining to the standard of written English in Bhutan. Further, it will also analyze what native speaker grammarians and anti-grammarians have to say as regards the teaching of grammar.

English teachers throughout the country are then expected to react to the ideas that will be outlined below. Finally, a more serious academic discussion on this area from different authorities is expected to generate some positive outcomes, to collaboratively standardize the level of written English throughout Bhutan.

Introduction

According to Downing and Locke, language, be it any, serves the basic human needs from two points of view:

1. To identify everything that is part of our existence like concrete things (an object), abstract ideas (honesty), general concepts (space, time), and concepts involving logical relationships (cause and effect)
2. To communicate with others in order to achieve a particular result.

On the basis of the above, they assert that all languages fulfill two higher-level functions in our life:

1. To express the interpretation of the world as we experience it, called the *ideational world*, and
2. Representational function, i.e. to interact with others in order to bring about changes in the environment. This function can be also called *interpersonal function*.

The interaction of these two functions gives rise to textual or contextual function, which essentially is the function of grammar. This situation sometimes compels teachers to teach grammar. Otherwise, the very function of language will be incomplete, which consequently poses the question of structure, the bulky component of grammar study.

Arguably, grammar, as an integral part of any language, serves the same purpose which language serves. Broadly, grammar encompasses the

total analysis of language including phonology, syntax, lexicology and, sometimes, discourse analysis.

To elaborate on all the components of grammar is not within the scope of this paper. However, the aforementioned two functions of language necessitate the study of grammar because a single concept or function can be expressed using a variety of grammatical structures. That is why the need to teach grammar may arise, to equip individuals to correctly perceive the 'ideational' world as well as to communicate effectively.

But at times, teachers are faced with insurmountable difficulties related to grammar teaching. What to teach and what to skip? Where to begin? How to design the curriculum? What to teach for which level of learners? And so on. It becomes, therefore, imperative to begin the analysis of grammar teaching with a more focused look at grammar in language teaching.

In the first place, should grammar be taught?

Arguing on grammar teaching, H.H. Stern (1992) says:

...traditionally, grammar has been the sine quo non of language teaching until quite recently, it was simply taken for granted in the English schools. Today, however, grammar teaching in all its aspects is questioned. Should grammar be taught to all? Is it a hindrance rather than help? Does grammar offer the best structures which are more suitable? If grammar, what kind -traditional, structural, transformational, or any other? Just as communicative language teaching has cast doubts on the value of pronunciation teaching, it has also led, even more forcibly, to similar doubts about grammar teaching...

Anti-grammarians answer the questions. For example, Ellis (1984) questions:

...Can syntax be taught? "No." With a clear and unambiguous tone.

He further states:

The analysis of grammatical features has no bearing on the ultimate competence of second language acquisition, a situation appropriate to Bhutanese learners of English as well. On the other hand, positive grammarians like Paulston and Brunder, (1975) believe:

Old-fashioned grammar rules and practice in applying them in structural drills remain the crucial centre of the process of language learning.

In Bhutan, English being a second language, grammar teaching-learning is pursued using two common techniques - subconscious absorption through 'use' and traditional drill method; the latter losing popularity in favour of the former, perhaps giving way to the present decline in the standard of written English.

Stressing upon the need to teach grammar, Bright and McGregor, (1970) argue:

...foreign student must learn the grammar of English in the sense that sentences that he/she writes must confirm to English patterns in the accepted model.

Similarly pro-grammarians, Paulston and Drunder (1975) consider:

"...Formal practice and grammatical explanation are absolutely essential to induce learning; even for learners who live in a target milieu".

Celce Maurice (1958) very early recognized that some learners have a preference for more holistic learning while others are more analytical. He says:

"... If we are not native speakers of the language that we teach, it is even more important that we have more access to trustworthy grammatical information".

Analyzing the views of these grammarians and anti-grammarians, it may be worthwhile for Bhutanese teachers to strike a balance, after considering the second language factor. Grammar certainly ought to be taught if the current concern on language proficiency is to be addressed. However, standards of written English are definitely not the only positive function of grammar teaching, as there are many other factors to consider. More research findings on what has caused the present "dilution" will assist teachers to look at English language teaching from different perspectives.

Advantages of Teaching Grammar in the Bhutanese Context

Generally, little literature has been written elsewhere on the advantages of teaching of grammar compared to those on the demerits; the reasons are evident: it is difficult to teach grammar especially the structures, applications and to carry out practice lessons through drills. Nevertheless, in our country, the following merits of teaching grammar can be identified:

- 1) English being the medium of instruction: the history of modern, liberal education system in the country begins with English as the medium of instruction. Today, most of the curricular subjects are being taught in English. The learners' ability to think and comprehend will be impaired in the absence of strong, correct English usage. To benefit from the access to a vast store of information archived in English, it is essential to teach grammar, which will equip our learners with the correct usage of the second language.
- 2) For effective written communication: English is the main tool for effective communication without undermining the *Zhungkha*. Most forms of communication, including official correspondences, in Bhutan take place in English. In the absence of grammar teaching, it will be impossible for language users to write and communicate properly, although one may be good at verbal communication.

3) The L2 factor: as Dzongkha is being developed currently, it might take some time for the same to evolve into a strong national language and replace English. It will not be an exaggeration to state that English, though L2, plays the role of L1 or even official language in Bhutanese public life. Documenting of almost all information is being done in English. Our educational curriculum especially high-school level onwards, demands for L2 requirement, for certification in examinations. Thus, the teaching of grammar empowers the Bhutanese to use it correctly and effectively, thereby fulfilling both the needs.

4) The emergence of 'Bhutanese English': English is indeed an international language.

In fact, English language has emerged as a distinct language in each country with its own peculiarities and flavour, thanks to British imperialism. Today, many Bhutanese feel more comfortable 'thinking' and expressing their ideas in English, than in their mother tongues! A multitude of forms of English literature is being created in the form of creative writing, translation works and journalistic writings. If the strength of this language is undermined, many a Bhutanese will be paralyzed in thinking clearly and expressing coherently. There is then no reason why grammar should not be taught to facilitate the further development of this fast-flourishing language in the Bhutanese soil.

5) To be a part of global community: to survive in the busy traffic of information superhighway, it is only imperative that grammar be taught, so that Bhutanese become a part of multicultural society by participating in WWW activities. Massive sources of information, the webs today provide ample distance learning materials, conveniently written in English, to those who aspire to pursue further education. Teaching grammar will pave the long way for Bhutanese to participate in and benefit from the information revolution, worldwide.

6) Helps learners learn how to learn: effective English users are also the same people who are successful independent learners. In a country where higher learning is a privilege for a lucky few, all can become independent learners if they are equipped with strong grammar teaching. Learners will, in other words, learn how to learn, as they will be able to easily comprehend the accessed literature from other secondary sources.

These and many others (you suggest) are some of the advantages of teaching English grammar in our country.

Demerits of teaching grammar

1) Attitudes of grammar teachers: Devitils et. al (1991) argues that: Until recently, many teachers were encouraged to feel negative about grammar, to adopt an emotional anti-grammarians stance and to regard grammar as inherently dull or old-fashioned. Does this apply to Bhutanese English teachers?

2) The teaching of grammar has been criticized from the point of view of lack of clear objective in teaching it. When so many merits have been already listed for teaching English grammar in Bhutan, the question of objective doesn't arise. However, at times it may be

true. Bright and McGregor (1970), for example, contend that “unless grammatical knowledge is going to be applied to reading, speaking, and, more obviously, writing, there is little justification in spending a great deal of time teaching it.”

3. Pessimism regarding grammar teaching: due to the nature of grammar as such the types of activities needed to be planned, methods of dealing with them, and the difficulties associated with teaching structures, pessimism may arise. This may specially be true in the Bhutanese context at the formative levels of grammar teaching.

The following are some of the difficulties of grammar teaching:

- 1) Interference from L1: with the smooth acquisition of the second language, 100% correspondence between tenses is assumed by the learners. In Bhutan, direct translation of thoughts from mother tongues have posed immeasurable difficulties. For example, students writing sentences like, “to eat food come” are not few.
- 2) Theoretical knowledge of grammar is taught: it is a stereotyped practice in our country to begin teaching of grammar with parts of speech - what is a noun, verb, and adjective, predicate? Too much theory inhibits learning correct usage, which actually comes more with practice. The dilemma faced in schools today is a confusion between teaching English using the NAPE-based ‘communicative approach, which claims that correct usage is a matter of ‘incidental’ guessing from the context; or teaching it using traditional approaches like structural, prescriptive drills. Perhaps, this confusion, to some extent, has resulted in the present problem of erroneous written English by whole generations of the Bhutanese, filtered through this system.
- 3) Monotony in teaching-learning: traditionally, grammar lessons have been more lecture-based than activity-based, thereby boring the learners to sleep in the class. For example, there is a difference between a teacher beginning a grammar lesson by telling “today, we will learn about interrogatives” and a teacher enabling students to ask questions about their teachers or friends to teach the same topic. In the former method, monotony will be more for both the teacher and the taught, than in the latter.
- 4) Grammar practice requires learning rules and drills: Macnamura (1973) expresses:

...it is impossible to specify the elements and rules of a language, that the rules we give to students are merely hints. It is often argued that learners do not learn enough skills when indoctrinated with rules, than they would if exposed to practices and drills. Inductive method based on ‘examples followed by practices, followed by rules’ is preferred to the deductive approach based on “rules followed by examples, followed by practice’.

- 5) Problems related to accuracy: teaching of foreign language can pose the difficulties of accuracy. If Bhutan's obsession is for accurate written English, the task will be daunting, with many teachers themselves 'not sure'. Fingers cannot be pointed against them, as they themselves are the products of the contemporary vicious cycle. Besides, many Bhutanese teachers teaching language to the target groups at the formative levels (the levels considered crucial by linguists), are themselves less equipped with accurate language usage as most of them are Primary Teacher Training pass outs, stated bluntly!
- 6) Inappropriate methods of error correction: usually errors made by the pupils are corrected mechanically by the teachers themselves leaving the 'error-makers' to correct themselves after realization. In our country, very few teachers discuss on the learners' past errors, so that the same mistakes are not repeated by the same learners next time.
- 7) Vastness and alien nature of grammar: it is said that English grammar has more than 3500 rules. Aggravating the problem of retention of rules is the unfamiliarity factor. "English grammar structures are not difficult to remember at the time of usage, but are very distant from our mother tongues", said many students that were interviewed on this issue.
- 8) Technicalities involved: many learners feel that the technicalities involved in sentence structures especially with regards to word order and agreements are confusing, making them 'mixed-up'. "Nouns as verbs or adjectives pose challenging problems to me", told many in a random survey.' Subject-verb agreement is the most technical that we find" wrote others. Except the ones that can master the art of correct usage, it is a genuine concern for others.

Having pointed out both merits and demerits of teaching English grammar in our context, it can be observed that the merits carry more strength than demerits. Assuming that Bhutanese ought to be taught English grammar formally at all the levels because of the inherent obstacles faced not only by them alone but even by the native speakers themselves, and holding 'not teaching grammar effectively' as responsible for the present concern of poor language proficiency, it is only logical that English teachers around the country begin teaching grammar by making their grammar teaching more effective and interesting.

Celve-Muria, (1985) has summarized various approaches to teaching grammar more effectively, which are reproduced below for our teachers to pick up, adopt, modify or use as such. They are, of course, intended as suggestive only and teachers are free to use their own creative methods.

- (a) Communicative activities as opposed to manipulative drills.
- (b) Context-embedded practice as opposed to context-free practice
- (c) Text-based exercises as opposed to sentence-based exercises

- (d) Authentic materials against contrived materials
- (e) Interesting and motivating content unlike dull or neutral content.

Conclusion

Grammar, being the integral part of language, plays the same role that language does. Correct interpretation of ideas and effective communication are the twin functions of language in general. Grammar which contributes to the correctness of language assists in fulfilling the aforementioned roles which necessitate grammar teaching. Grammar teaching has not been without controversies even amongst the native speakers. Grammarians and anti-grammarians have traded their arguments, equally convincing for learners of English as foreign language.

The Bhutanese soil has proved very fertile for English language to flourish. From the days of the advent of western liberal, modern education in this country, English has always played a vital role in the Bhutanese public life. Owing to its importance, it is not surprising to express concerns at the supposedly deteriorating standard. Although grammar teaching has many advantages and disadvantages in the Bhutanese context, the final verdict should be for the teaching of grammar, to give a face-lift to English language in Bhutan. This will be possible only through a collaborative approach amongst teachers, curriculum officers, researchers, parents and ultimately the learners. Language teaching is an essential part of L2. However, in doing so as Celce-Maria (1985) states:

We have to consider the course objectives together with a number of learner variables such as age, educational background and learning styles in order to make informed decisions about the role of grammar in language teaching.

Finally, in order to improve the standard of English, we have to have a sound policy on grammar teaching by not over-simplifying the issue and bearing in mind the fact that there is no single answer to the question of how to handle grammar in the classroom.

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Most of the materials used are based on the author's own observations and experiences noted during the course of teaching English. Some opinions shared by students interviewed randomly have been cited which the author gratefully acknowledges.

THE STUDY OF GRAMMAR IN OUR LOWER SECONDARY LEVELS:

Functional versus traditional grammar teaching: a trainee's perspective.

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Judging by the way some people speak, there is no place for grammar in the language course nowadays. It seems to have gone underground, as it were, like a communist cell in a country where the party is banned. Yet, it is in reality as important as it ever was.

First, let me say something about the traditional grammar method. It is a deductive and intellectual method, according to which the language is acquired by 'memorizing the grammatical rules, paradigms and long lists of vocabulary and is practised by the application of this knowledge in exercises.

Twenty years ago, this was the method of teaching grammar in our schools and the standard of English was supposed to be good in Bhutan. The traditional grammar teaching had its own drawbacks as well as advantages. It was difficult for those learners with low retention ability but those who had good retention capacity learned well and were able to put it into use outside their classrooms.

There was definitely greater exposure to language as a whole because grammar was taught as a separate subject and students had to write separate examinations for grammar. They studied a text known as *Brighter Grammar*. Not only that, they had to pass English 1 and English 2 separately. To top it all, they had a book called *Spell Well*, which again was another formal textbook. Therefore, we can see that children during those days had more English lessons than at present. Moreover, definitely, the more exposed one is to this foreign language, the better one will be. Today, children do not learn grammar as a separate subject, so a part of their exposure to language structure is reduced.

Interviewing some of the teachers around who studied 20 years ago, I found out that their interest in reading was immense compared to how much children read nowadays. Reading gave them extra reinforcement to structural English, which they learned, in their classrooms. These days, children hardly read and this reading problem has become as acute as the grammar problem.

When the Department of Education came up with their idea of NAPE, the grammar component also got integrated into the English textbook. This, of course, is how language is learnt in other countries too. However, in my opinion, the countries where English is their L-1, this system worked very well. However, in our situation, it is quite difficult for this system to work effectively as English is our L-2. Until and unless explicit information about a particular language structure is provided and practised, we cannot assume children will understand from a single exercise in a textbook.

Learning a language is not only learning a particular language; it is learning to be sensitive to language in general; learning to be alert to language signals; learning not to be dismayed by strange forests of words; but to search for ways into the forest, clearing tracks and footpaths. We can drive rapidly through a forest in an hour or so on a broad motor road, and know something of it afterwards. But to know the forest intimately, we must walk or ride through it in every direction - preferably, at first, with

someone who knows the forest and its trees well - and hack our own paths through the densest thickets; we must live in it.

Categorizing will be recognition of the unity underlying many particular experiences. Grammar is the recognition of the pattern and unity underlying verbal experiences.

The teaching of grammar has provided the main battleground for the controversies and methodological discussions concerning the language. It is evident that all languages are governed by a set of grammatical norms and, therefore, grammar is present in all the teaching-learning situations of a foreign language. The problem is the way in which these grammatical elements should be taught. Should it be taught through memorizing rules, which are then applied to exercises or in an inductive way, using structural exercises or drills, which practise a particular structure, but without specific reference to the underlying general rules?

With due respect to the teachers in the field, I want to share certain opinions that are based on my experience as an Apprentice Teacher. I feel our students are perfectly capable of understanding basic grammatical explanations. And what is more? These explanations are useful to our students and help them in their task of learning and perfecting the English language. This, of course, does not mean, again, that we should limit ourselves to presenting a series of grammatical rules without concern for how these are registered and productively assimilated in the student's mind.

Teachers need to provide additional information apart from what is there in the textbooks and manuals. I have gone through the textbooks and manuals of classes III – VIII, and found that they had very limited topics dealing with grammar. For example, on page 89 of the English Book for Class 5, I saw a page on 'Countable and Uncountable Nouns'.

If I am not mistaken, most of us teachers will just make the children open the book to page 89, explain, briefly, what it is all about and then make the children do the exercise. If the children finish the work in the class, the teacher might correct it and explain why something is wrong or right. On the other hand, if the bell rings, the children will be asked to take it as homework. And in some cases, the homework might never get corrected. That way, the children would have hardly learnt anything about 'Countable and Uncountable Nouns'. Next time a child writes 'He gave me few rice', the teacher will cross out 'a few'. My question is: will the child know why 'a few' cannot go with rice?

What I am trying to say over here is that, besides what is provided in the textbooks, the teacher needs to get extra information on the particular topic and making children do extra exercises is very essential for them to remember the language structure for a long time. And, of course, getting them corrected is a must! All this demands a lot of hard work and commitment from us, the teachers.

However, we, teachers, do have our own problems too, for instance, most schools do not have proper reference books for teachers, and if we work on a lot of extra exercises for our children, then we might again face the problem of syllabus coverage, which is at times given undue emphasis.

Also some of us, ourselves, lack the knowledge of teaching grammar, and then what would we teach the children? For example, a teacher has taught his children the use of articles and he/she had said that 'the' is used in front of a particular thing. A student from his class writes 'the Kitchu Lhakhang'. The teacher automatically circles 'the' in front of Kitchu Lhakhang. My question is: Is the child completely wrong? What

the child had in mind when he/she wrote this line was what the teacher had said: Kitchu Lhaxhang is a particular thing so the child is partially correct. Here, the teacher had failed to give the correct information about the usage of the definite article which should have been that 'the' is used in front of a particular thing but not in front of names of people and places.

So how can a teacher insensitively say that the child is wrong?

If in the first place, the teacher had not taught the language structure completely, or if the teacher himself or herself does not possess this knowledge, this will also discourage the child to learning grammar.

Once more, I am emphasizing how important it is for the teachers to be adequately equipped to teach grammar.

I am not suggesting that we return to the traditional way of grammar teaching either - that grammar can be taught in isolation

From the other language aspects and components, we know that the general view of learning a foreign language is directed towards the students acquiring communication competence that is to say, the acquisition of a series of skills which permit the learner to communicate in most common situations in daily life.

If we accept that the fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language, then we must try to integrate the teaching of grammar into a communicate framework, with adequate information provided for the teachers to handle the given topic effectively and meaningfully.

Our teachers almost depend completely on their textbooks and manuals for their teaching. Thus, if these manuals are quite shallow in their content, we really can't expect the teacher to do wonders with them. I feel that the best way of providing extra information to our teachers is by supplying them with the manuals because these are the books which our teachers need for sure.

Although some teachers do question the usefulness and convenience of textbooks on the basis that they constrain the teaching-learning process, and thus do not meet the specific interest and needs of different learning situations, I do agree with them.

A textbook is not a panacea and we cannot expect that it will solve our entire problems and satisfy all students' needs. Textbooks, like any other medium, have inherent limitations. As Robert O'Neill says "textbooks can at best provide only a base or a core of materials. They are the jumping-off point for teaching and for the class. They should not aim to be more than that. A great deal of the most important work in a class may start with the text but end outside it". Functional grammar or traditional grammar – which one should we employ in our classrooms? The answer appears to be obvious "the best one" the need to be eclectic when choosing a method, to accept the good and positive elements of each methodological kind and to collect together all that is most suitable for our children.

Let me summarize what I said earlier. What I am basically saying is that:

First of all, the English language teacher should have quite a sound knowledge of grammar, if not he/she should have easy excess to good reference books.

Second, for children to have correct language, a lot of practice has to be given in whichever form it is.

Third, careful and constant correction of children's written work will go a long way in enhancing children's grammar knowledge.

Lastly, development of reading habits in children reinforces good language.

In conclusion, I would like to pose a few pertinent questions to my trainee-friends and the more experienced teachers here:

1. Does the EVS teaching in Dzongkha endanger the standard of English because of the relatively less exposure to English?

2. Are the trained teachers capable of integrating grammar in the communicative framework? If yes, it is fine. If not, should the NIEs train them in this area?

3. Are the manuals and the textbooks adequate for children to develop a good language?

* * *

STIMULUS VARIATION AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHING

- Kailash Rai

Introduction

What all the great teachers appear to have in common is love of their subject, an obvious satisfaction in arousing this love in their students, and an ability to convince them that what they are being taught is deadly serious.

- Epstein, (1991, p. XII)

If I was asked to visualize a typical teacher in our country, Bhutan, any of the number of pictures could take birth in my mind. One image might be that of an awe-inspiring erudite egg-head lecturing from the front to the mass of students, who are leaning forward to catch possibly every word being spoken.

The other image might be that of a gentle, warm, approachable person seated at the table among a group of students. Yet, still another could be of an instructor freewheeling a session in the laboratory.

Varied as these imaginations are, they are all alike and akin in several fundamental ways. These images of teachers all convey a sense of impact – a potentially profound effect on the students. In each of these instances, the learners, the students, are emotionally and intellectually stimulated by the teacher. However, the effectiveness and efficiency remain the other sides of the process.

As a matter of fact, students often complain of boring lectures, grim discussion sessions, unapproachable teachers, hostile classroom environment – and with good reasons. What differences among students demand different paradigms of teaching? To know and understand the individual differences and levels of intellect among them is the function of a good and challenging teacher.

The imperative character of education for individual enhancement and social development is now accepted globally. The root meaning of education is 'bringing up' or 'leading out', making manifest inherent potentialities. In technical terms, education, however, refers to the process by which society through its different institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage to its young – its accumulated values, knowledge and skills from one generation to another which could be done by mere teaching. This very fact makes the teaching a more technical and professional job.

Teaching is a complex process, which is not merely lecture loaded with a mass of information, but consists of multitudes of purposeful tasks and skills. Effective teaching, therefore, is more than communication, transmission of facts, instilling of values but it also requires interaction between students and teachers as well as among students themselves. Classrooms are set-up for sharing teachers' ideas with the young and growing minds which are followed by abilities and aptitudes, helping the child learn, interact with the immediate surroundings, by making use of various strategies. There are various skills that a teacher could use in order to synthesize the effective teaching and learning process.

Drawing on direct observation of teaching, through my own teaching experience, boredom and disinterestedness are often the most dreaded problems in the teaching-learning process. However, the instructional styles of many teachers do not even recognize this factor as a demoralizing parameter.

'Stimulus Variation' refers to the most practical application of a variety of stimuli in the classroom in order to propel the inter-personal relationship between the teacher and the students. Through stimulus variation in the teaching-learning system, there can be invariably greater effectiveness in the whole process. With this objective, I have taken up this research, based on direct experiences, interviews with senior teachers and resource students

What is Stimulus Variation?

Through my teaching experience and direct observation and also through co-relation with other facts and findings, I have come to conclude, though not accurately proved with scientific systems, that the teacher's personality and the impact of teaching on the mass is not independent of other factors. The appearance of the teacher is dependent on dress, grooming and the cheerful facial expression, presented with a genuine, warm, hearty and pleasant smile. However, learning becomes passive if the teacher fails to inspire the students' perception and attention.

Students vary greatly in the way they approach the classroom environment and the degree to which they apply their intellectual talents. This is the function of an important principle that governs meaningful communication in the classroom situation. Both the teacher and the student generally treat each other in a way that they wish or expect to be treated. Research on interpersonal perception and behaviour has already clearly demonstrated an interactive effect: "personal attitudes tend to produce reciprocal attitudes in others" (Johns, 1972; Altman & Taylor, 1973).

'Perhaps a major reason for the slow and unsure progress in education has been the inefficient and unscientific methods used by educators in acquiring knowledge and solving their problems. An uncritical acceptance of authority opinion that is not supported by objective evidence and an over-dependence upon personal experience have been characteristics of the educators' problem solving technique'.

- Louis Cohen and Lawrence Manion, (1989, p.5)

Variation and variety have always been associated with enjoyable learning and good teaching. Good teaching implies to maximum assimilation of what has been taught and what has been expected out of it - the positive change of behaviour.

Let us pay attention to some variations in mode for breaking this monotony. I have always been trying my best to depart from the conventional teaching. Here, the strong point is, the initial impression made by the teacher's appearance is confirmed and contradicted by the voice and words, action and reinforcements, not only our voice or tone, action or inaction but, also the choice of our words are extremely important for effective and quality teaching.

Therefore, from my understanding, stimulus variation refers to the process of change and evolution in the teaching system, practical application of a variety of stimuli in the classroom environment.

Importance of Stimulus Variation in Teaching and Learning

The skill of variability as it relates to the teacher's manner is specifically concerned with the variation, exquisite display and execution of voice, gesture and movement in the teaching arena. More generally, it refers to the teacher's animation, enthusiasm and the ability to convince the students.

I found that this variation is an immense asset to the teachers, especially to those teaching literature and the humanities. It all depends on how the variation is executed. I know this simple fact that the students do not anticipate mechanical voice, but they prefer genuine pleasure, interest, sincerity, warmth, enthusiasm, and friendliness demonstrated by the teacher by mere animation and tone of his voice.

In any class at given time, the teacher's gestures and animation may not only have the effect of arousing the focusing students' attention to a subject, but could have added quality meaning to verbal communication.

In the classroom situation, I have experienced that variation in mode of broadcasting ideas to the students in terms of inflection, gesture, mobility, flexibility and expression form a very important part of a teacher's personality which pupils mark as the teacher's overview, energy, confidence and competence. This perception of the students plays a vital role in focusing, sustaining and alerting their attention towards objectives, thereby making teaching productive, efficient, and interesting.

Therefore, what I understand from this experience is that achievements in student comprehension, retention, retrieval and manipulation of given information according to the need are related more significantly to the teacher's enthusiasm, initiative, motivation and energy.

Simply put, variation in the teacher's personal techniques, more precisely, those which directly portray animation, energy, enthusiasm, interest, sincerity, sympathy and confidence significantly affect students' learning. Equally, it enhances the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the students and also makes the teaching process more lucid, stimulating, understandable and fruitful. The most prominent function of variation is 'clarity of presentation' and emphasis.

I have found that the dynamic presentation delivered from memory, with vocal inflection, animation, gesturing, eye contact, mobility and flexibility, is transparent in the students' achievements of the objectives.

Components of Stimulus Variation

One of the areas of effective teaching that I find very important but quite difficult to prepare is knowing how to approach subject-delivery. The other thing which is certain that I have noticed and experienced is that an organized and pre-planned lesson will have an edge over many aspects. Stimulus variation enhances the teaching-learning process manifold. Stimulus variation is normally a variation and application of systematic techniques in the three main areas:

- I. Personal Teaching Styles (Teacher's mannerism)
- II. Media and Materials of Instructions (Resources) and
- III. Teacher-Student interaction (Inter-personal communication)

The idea of variation is closely linked with variety since changes introduced in teaching inevitably lead to instructions characterized by variety. Variation is more inclined towards actual process. The main objectives of stimulus variation are to make

teaching skills more professional and demanding. The impact of stimulus variation is concerned basically with:

- arousing students' attention and further sustain it.
- motivating learning through new exploration and investigation.
- building positive feelings towards teachers and school.
- Catering to individual sensory preferences and facilitating learning.
- promoting learning by involving students.
- Promoting *edu-tainment* (education + entertainment)

What I have experienced is that it is essential that all possible variations in accordance to the situations be purposefully employed with smoothness and continuity. However, it should be carefully structured and modulated.

Now let us discuss how we can use stimulus variation in the classroom situation in our day today teaching. What is important is the genuine disposition with utmost care and consideration for the students' interest, wants, desires, likes, dislikes, feelings and opinions. I hope all the teachers in the country will agree with me because they have been teaching so long.

Variation in Personal Teaching Style

Variation in teacher's manner can be infinite. The change could be instant or otherwise. If carefully executed, these changes can be very effective and productive. The impact and efficiency also depends on the teacher's showmanship. Teachers' behaviour includes the following elements:

I. Voice Modulation

This is inclusive of tone, pitch, volume and speed of speech. A pleasant conversational talking style is best for the teacher to adopt and this will naturally include moderate vocal variation. I have found that students often like a kind of a voice that is friendly, free, smooth and agreeable to hear. However, the teacher should dramatize an event, emphasize points and relate quietly to individual in the classroom.

II Focusing

Focusing is narrowing student's attention to a particular subject or an object. This is often accompanied by gestural focusing where the teacher points to an object or taps the table for emphasis. This will help to focus attention on a point.

III Pausing

As required, insertion of space for silence in the teacher's talk and teaching activity is yet another focusing device. Before starting a lesson, I pause for a few seconds which will focus the attention of students. This

will doubly increase the lesson objective: it captures attention by changing the stimulus from one of noise to silence.

IV. Eye Contact

The teacher should shift his/her gaze around the classroom, possibly meeting every student's eye with his/hers, establishing positive relationship and avoiding impersonality. The teacher can gain cues on student's interest and understanding. From my experience, it can be used to help convey information, reinforcement and agreement.

V. Gesturing

Variation on facial expressions, bodily movement and hand gesturing are very important aspects of communication. The impact of gesture synchronized with variation in voice and words will yield tremendous positive results in teaching; not only conveying information but helping convey the meaning of oral message.

VI. Movement

The movement of the teacher in the teaching space helps sustain students' attention and also personalize his/her teaching. As the occasion demands, the teacher needs to move back the forth, left and right, behind and beside the pupils.

The most important point that I would like to reiterate here is that these stylistic variations must be purposefully employed and executed, and not overdone.

It is a fact that teachers can overplay or otherwise underplay their roles; in either of these cases, the teaching will not be effective.

Variation in the Media and Materials

The media and materials of instructions may be listed into three broad components on the basis of the predominant sensory mode of communication and the type of effect they can yield. They are:

- I. Aural - concerned with hearing / audio
- II. Visual - concerned with sight / vision, and
- III. Tactile - concerning with touch.

Alternating between these components necessitates a large number of sensory adjustments for high level of attention. The novelty or materials and the technical delivery encourage the curiosity and motivation of the students.

I. Aural Variation

The teacher's voice is the most common mode of communication in every classroom anywhere. This general aural mode needs sufficient voice modulation and abundant switching with visual and tactile media. Of course, there are a number of other aural possibilities, which can be

successfully employed in the class. Recorded music and plays, audio taped roar of a river, silence of the wilderness, or for that matter, anything could be gainfully introduced into a relevant situation. Student (s) own voice can be taped and played. Nothing could motivate more than hearing one's own voice.

II. Visual Variation

Visual variation can be used as an added advantage. Simple objects like chalk board, sketches, pictures, bulletin board, film, TV items, library resources, field trip, short shooting of the activities in the class can enrich and enhance teaching.

III. Tactile Variation

The final element of variability related to media and material is the teachers' provision of opportunity for the pupils to touch and manipulate real objects and materials of instructions. This could involve children in construction or modeling activities.

Interaction Variation: Changes in teacher-student communication

Changes in general pattern of interaction with students will definitely produce a very effective situation in teaching-learning process. I still remember some of my teachers in my student life, the very traditional and conventional ones. They were sort of pedagogical terrors. Of course, the pattern of interaction may range from a situation dominated by teacher talk to a situation where students work independently of teachers. The teacher might provide opportunities for students, possibly working in pairs and small groups to exchange ideas, ideals, thoughts, opinions and problems through exposition, discussion or demonstration without teacher's intervention.

As far as I am concerned, teachers should create a friendly atmosphere in the class room for a healthy teaching-learning experience. Students should feel that their opinion is also taken account of. They also should feel that their right of sitting in the class, right to learn, and right of individuality is duly taken care of and protected.

Therefore, the teacher should take utmost cares of the student's individuality through genuinely:

- accepting their feelings
- praising and encouraging them (reinforcing)
- accepting the ideas of students
- asking questions
- solving problems
- giving directions
- counselling
- taking their opinion into account.

These things will encourage students and reinforce their positive feelings towards learning.

Thus, the teacher may vary the cognitive activities of the students by moving from levels of their intellect and understanding. Besides listening to the teacher, pupils may

contribute in small buzz-groups, discussion, projects, seminars, and mock sessions or in various learning activities. The classroom configuration may be changed in accordance to the convenience of the activities. Therefore, the degree of dominance by the either side- teacher or student - is perfectly balanced, invigorating the teaching-learning process.

C o n c l u s i o n

Teaching is one of the most demanding jobs. I always have the pride to announce, to my peers or any one up that mark, that teaching is a challenge and a precision job. It needs persistence, consistency, perseverance, and dynamism. However, it is as difficult as it is noble and graceful. Teaching is meant for learners and as well as for the teacher. Thus, stimulus variation has to be taken up by the teacher, seriously.

As I have been a teacher, I now know the impact of variation in tones, actions and day to day teaching methods. I always try to introduce, to the best of my ability, the essence of dynamism in my teaching space. Not only the tone and voice but the choice of words is very crucial for effective teaching. Individuals have different movement styles, action, gestures, and expressions as they are different and they use different speech styles and tones. Unless this skill is well understood by the teacher, the students will miss the essence of teaching, and teaching remains incomplete.

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A Comparison of Examination Scores under Centralized and Decentralized Systems of Marking in Class VI Mathematics in Bhutan.

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Introduction and Background

In 1999, Bhutan's Department of Education decentralized the responsibility for administration and scoring of the National Level Examination for Class VI. While the objective of decentralizing the examinations was to invite schools and teachers to assume a more prominent role in the assessment of students at the local level, the shift in examination policy caused considerable anxiety among general public and teachers. Generally, the concerns revolved around how much reliance could be placed on the results of the new system and whether or not they could be treated at par with the traditional system of marking.

This study investigated the reliability of marking of the 1999 Class VI Mathematics answer-scripts under two different conditions of scoring (decentralized and centralized). A sample of 1100 Math answer-scripts was systematically selected from a population of 7500 papers for this purpose. Ninety-one primary and junior high schools out of 178 schools were represented in the data. The scripts were scored (1) by teachers in schools and (2) they were re-marked by a group of teachers selected from schools in Thimphu. The group of teachers followed the traditional central marking system.

Pearson correlation and t-test for paired samples were used to explore the correlation and differences between school markers and central markers.

In addition, this study also investigated the use and role of marking guidelines provided by the Bhutan Board of Examinations Division (BBED) to schools after the decentralization of class VI National Examination. For this purpose, a survey of 152 class VI teachers was conducted.

Method and Procedures

The Research Design

This was a comparative study examining the results produced under two different scoring systems, decentralized and centralized. The study investigated the reliability of student marks in Maths on Class VI National Examination given by teachers from across Bhutan under decentralized marking system by comparing the marks derived under the traditional centralized marking system. Six teachers from schools in Thimphu were engaged for central marking. The marks of the school teachers were compared against marks given by the central markers for the same answer-scripts.

Sample

A systematic random sampling technique was used to select 1100 answer-scripts out of 7500 papers from schools. The sample represented 91 primary and junior high schools with Class VI and was a valid representation of all schools across Bhutan.

Five hundred and ninety seven answer-scripts came from schools located in urban areas and 503 from schools in rural areas. The schools which were located at least a day's walk from road-head were classified as rural schools, while schools located at road-heads were categorized as urban.

The sample scripts consisted of 624 boys and 476 girls. The urban schools consisted of 302 boys and 295 girls while the rural schools consisted of 322 boys and 181 girls.

Distribution of Class VI Answer Scripts by Gender

Gender	Number
Boys	624
Girls	476
Total	1100

Variables

The variables used in this investigation were schools marks, central marks, student gender, school setting (urban and rural), and the distribution of responses from the teacher survey. School marks were the scores awarded to a sample of class VI students by their teachers under decentralized conditions. Central marks were the scores awarded by committee markers of the same answer-scripts but under centralized conditions during the marking session conducted by a group of selected teachers from Thimphu.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 10) was used to analyze the data. The statistical procedures used were descriptive and inferential. The descriptive statistics consisted of the frequency, means, standard deviation and the Pearson Product moment correlation while inferential statistics consisted of the t-test.

Summary of findings

Several hypotheses were tested using SPSS. The result showed a very high correlation ($r = .939$) between the average scores given under decentralized conditions and centralized conditions regardless of the school's geographic location and the gender of students. In other words, the location of schools and the gender of students were not related to the marks they received on the mathematics portion of the class VI National Examination. However, the data did reveal that scripts scored by central markers (average mean = 9.92) tended to be slightly lower than the scores awarded by school teachers (average mean = 10.58) but the ranking of students was almost identical under the two conditions.

Correlation between Decentralized Marks and Centralized Marks on the Class VI National Examination by Location

Setting	Pearson Correlation	n	p
Urban & Rural Combined	0.939	1100	<0.000

Urban only	0.939	597	<0.000
Rural only	0.938	503	<0.000

It should, however, be remembered that this study was limited to the Maths section of the National Examination and therefore, would not be appropriate to generalize its findings for other subjects, especially languages, which have more essay-type and non-objective questions.

Mathematics as such lends itself to greater objectivity in scoring, although one may argue that section B of the paper demanded analysis and critical thinking processes from the children. Therefore, it is quite possible that the high degree of marker reliability could have been affected by this factor. Further, and most importantly, the marking guidelines provided by the BBE could have helped the teachers in the process of marking. The survey response showed that 87.5% ($n = 133$) of the teachers responded, saying the guidelines were easy to understand and follow. This indicates that marking guidelines helped teachers maintain reliability in scoring the answer-scripts.

The survey also showed that 70.4% ($n = 107$) of the teachers discussed the marking guidelines before they began marking the papers, further supporting the relationship between marking guidelines and the high correlation of marks. Therefore, it is evident that the discussion helped teachers understand the marking procedure.

Although the survey showed that 74.3% ($n = 113$) of the teachers did not have the opportunity to attend the evaluation camp conducted by the BBE, the marks had a very high correlation which further warrants the use of marking guidelines and discussion before marking.

Another factor contributing to the high correlation could be the smaller number of class sections each teacher had to mark. The survey showed that 78.3% ($n = 199$) of teachers marked their own section. This could be because the school had only one section of class VI which also means that the teachers had sufficient time to mark the papers slowly and follow the guidelines carefully.

One more factor contributing to the reliability of marking could have been the nature of the questions themselves. The fact that the Maths questions had many sub-parts and were shorter compared to other subjects such as English, History, Dzongkha could have contributed to high reliability. In addition, the Maths questions were not entirely open-ended as in other subjects.

Another factor, which could have contributed to reliability, appears to be the type of questions. The questions were such that the students could either get the full point or no point for any particular question attempted. For example, question 5 sub-part a(i) of 1999 Class VI Maths has 2 points and asks the students to convert a percentage to a decimal. For such questions, students can either get full points or no point.

Results of Pearson Correlation show that location of schools had no affect on the consistency of marking. This could also be attributed to the availability of marking guidelines while the competency of our teachers is not ruled out. However, there is also a possibility that by sheer coincidence the samples selected happened to be marked by teachers who already had a greater experience or the ones who had the opportunity to participate in the evaluation workshop in the past. This possibility is nevertheless very less remote since the samples were randomly selected from all the four regions of the country.

Literature shows that the gender of both students and marker can play a significant role in scoring a paper (Goddard-Spear, 1983, as quoted in Gipps). The result of the study, however, shows that the gender of students had no effect on the consistency of marking. This shows a high degree of efficiency and professionalism in our teachers. This is also an evidence of unbiased marking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning here that the results of this study provide evidence only for inter-rater reliability, the consistency in marking of the same answer-scripts by different markers, in this case school teachers and central markers. Other aspects of reliability, which have not been studied here, include the possibility of obtaining the same result if the examination had been given to the same set of students at a different time (test-retest reliability), or the possibility of obtaining the same result had the same students been given equivalent but a different examination (parallel form reliability).

Generally, the findings of the study indicate that teachers in schools are competent as examination markers. Therefore, in the light of the findings of this study it may be stated that the fears expressed by the public are unfounded. However, as noted earlier, it should be remembered that this study provides evidence of consistency in only one subject and one aspect of reliability.

To ascertain whether the findings of this study are representative, a similar study using other subjects, particularly languages (English and Dzongkha) that are non-objective, would be helpful. Past research has shown that discrepancies in marking could be more frequent in essay-type questions where the responses are open-ended. This places a greater emphasis on the need to carry out such studies on the above-mentioned subjects.

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Perceptions of Early School Leavers in Bhutan

- Tshering Dolker, YGCD

Abstract

The study *Perceptions of Early School Leavers in Bhutan* was conducted towards fulfilling the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in the Graduate Academic Unit of Educational Foundations.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, describe, and understand the experiences of the students who left school early without completing their high school, that is, classes 8 to 9. Eleven school youth participated in individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and then analyzed to uncover and develop categories and themes.

Data analysis led to the development of three themes: 1) students' perception of their having to leave school early; 2) how leaving school affected students' lives; and 3) what could have been done to keep them in school. While differences existed in individual's experiences in school, there were also similarities in experiences. A number of factors such as family-related problems, school-related problems and students' personal interest seem to have guided their decisions to leave school early. Although these variables seem to appear by themselves, it is important to note that the characteristic indicators must be viewed in combination and not in isolation in understanding early school leaving.

Schools need to extend proper guidance and counselling services to the students who need them. Teachers should be able to detect students' problems at an early stage and guide them in their decisions. It is imperative that teachers be trained in this particular field.

Introduction

This study examines the various circumstances under which Bhutanese students leave school early. This preliminary study represents an attempt to identify and highlight issues which need attention for all of the concerned parties, such as policy makers, teachers, and parents. While this study does not aim to provide solutions, it does hope to provide insights into the factors which contribute to the problem. How well we understand what is going on in the minds of these young people and what causes them to leave school prematurely is essential to our eventually addressing this issue.

Studying characteristics common to early school leavers allows educators to identify children who may be at risk of leaving school prior to graduation. Designing effective interventions to encourage these children to stay in school would help create awareness and hopefully prepare the students to face work. By leaving high school prior to graduation, most school leavers have serious educational deficiencies in skills, attitudes, and knowledge for employment or further education (Tanner, Krahn, & Hartnagel, 1995).

It is imperative that Bhutanese students are able to make informed decisions about their lives, with work and study options, to enable them to face challenges and responsibilities of the future as productive citizens. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has constantly reminded the Bhutanese of the importance of the youth and such a concern is clearly evident in his statement, "The future of the nation lies in the hands of our younger generation. It is, therefore, crucial that they live up to our high expectations and ensure the continued well-being (of the people) and security of the nation" (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1999).

Conducting research on early school leaving has given me an opportunity to better understand the perceptions of Bhutanese youth. This study has also helped me to understand the process of leaving school as a complex phenomena involving school, personal, and social factors rather than just the simple act of "leaving" school. It has also helped me understand the meaning of early school leaving in the Bhutanese context and its implications. Early school leaving is not just about leaving school, but also, the impact it will have on society as it becomes more advanced technologically. The result of early school leaving will be an increase in disenfranchised and troubled youth, as well as vast, personal costs to individuals.

Developed countries which once considered early school leaving to be simply an educational dilemma are now acknowledging it as a social problem. Bhutan, a developing country, is going through the same phase as developed countries once did. Bhutanese children's early school leaving is associated with the educational problems enmeshed with family and personal problems. It is obvious that if interventions are not introduced quickly a social problem is bound to emerge.

The personal, social, and economic costs of ignoring this problem are clear. Early school leaving must be acknowledged, further researched, and addressed for the pervasive issue it constitutes in Bhutan.

Background

Early school leavers do not conform to stereotypical attitudes that we usually take for granted. There are complex reasons and experiences which start the disengagement of students from the process of schooling. The process of disengagement from the educational system begins long before the student finally leaves school. Leaving school is not a single decisive and impulsive act but the actual process of disengagement from the educational system is associated with a variety of student, school, and family-related problems which are intrinsically interwoven. The students at risk of leaving school early are not necessarily those with the least intellectual ability, but it is this interaction between student, home and school that plays a crucial role in an individual's decision to drop out. Although early school leaving is an inevitable aspect of the educational process, we cannot neglect its implications on the society, the economy of the country, and the individuals involved. Without a required qualification, early school leavers face unemployment or a low-paying, blue-collar, job and may experience feelings of inferiority and alienation. The costs of quitting school are high not only for the early school leaver but also for society, which must bear the burden of growing youth problems, such as drugs, crime, and unemployment in the country.

Although my study is neither representative nor generalizable, it provides significant insight into understanding these students' perspectives of early school leaving in Bhutan. It is clear from this study that there is a lot of work to be done in our schools in order to effectively confront issues of early school leaving. The results of the study indicate the importance of introducing guidance and counselling programmes in the schools. It is evident that with the establishment of Youth Guidance and Counselling Section (YGCS) in February 1996 which became a Division in 1999, Bhutan is already

on its way to developing a comprehensive youth programme. This new section has been created with the aim of developing a comprehensive youth programme, in particular career education, to complement the formal education system in providing a wholesome education for our children (YGCS, 1997). YGCD will, therefore, become an integral part of the schooling system in not only promoting career education in schools but also in providing direction to help individuals set appropriate life goals, inculcate a sense of responsibility, and develop an attitude of self-reliance amongst the students.

Purpose

In the Bhutanese education system, early school leaving is evident and it is seen as a natural phenomenon. It is important to analyze the underlying factors of early school leaving in order to understand the youth problems. Many of us have this stereotypical attitude towards understanding why students leave school early and we see it only from our own perspective. Therefore, this study was purposely conducted to create awareness and provide enough information about early school leaving in Bhutan.

The literature review on early school leavers indicates that leaving school early is a complex phenomenon. The circumstances arising from family, social and economic problems all can contribute to an individual's decision to leave school. The family background, personal issues and school practices which are the "causes" of early school leaving present a complex set of problems. It is also an inevitable fact that these factors are deeply woven with others in their own ways. The literature review also identified the important individual, family, and school characteristics associated with early school leaving, as well as the types of reasons these early school leavers provide for their decision to quit school. Finally, it has also brought about an understanding of the previous research findings which suggested early school leaving as typically one event in a long process of exiting from the educational system. This web of conditions surrounding those at risk of leaving school early makes intervention an overwhelming challenge for all educators.

The eleven youth who I interviewed displayed differences and similarities in their experiences and how they conceptualize their leaving school early. Through hearing the experiences of these students, I have gained a better understanding of how students perceive their leaving school before completing their high school, that is, in Classes VIII to X.

According to my understanding, a large number of variables are interlinked and associated with one another which influence the decision to leave school. Therefore, it is important to note that characteristic indicators must be viewed in combination, and not in isolation, while trying to understand the reasons for leaving school early.

These eleven school youth brought out the various aspects of leaving school early in Bhutan. Amongst them are family-related problems such as lack of family and financial support; school-related problems such as labelling students, loss of self-esteem, lack of support from teachers, low academic achievement, lack of encouragement from teachers, peer pressure, and pass-for-training categorizations, and personal-related problems such as being far away from home, pregnancy, health problems, traditional beliefs, age factors, and peer influence. Each of the individual characteristics is further described by the individuals in their own words to explain their decision to leave school.

This writing is an attempt to describe and understand the experiences of each of these youth, and to unfold realities from their perspectives. Before proceeding further, I

should state that what follows is how my participants explain why they have left school early without having completed their high school. The participants' exact words are used to capture the richness of the themes emerging from their explanations of their decisions to leave school.

I. Students' Perceptions of Early School Leaving

A. Family-Related Problems

For most of my participants, leaving school early was influenced by their own family-related problems. The Bhutanese family system and values have always been strongly maintained. Family is an integral part of the Bhutanese culture and obligation to family is one of its highest values. For a Bhutanese, family comes first. Family values such as love, respect, care, and financial and social support, are instilled from a very young age. This, in essence, is the kind of environment in which a Bhutanese is born and reared. From a very young age, older children in the family start looking after the younger ones and help their parents in the day-to-day household chores. Every child in the family is responsible for everyone else but the eldest has the most responsibility. In the absence of the parents, the eldest son or daughter automatically assumes the role of looking after the younger ones. Children are a source of income to most of the families, especially for those middle and lower income families. Any disruption in family life, whether personal or social, has a direct influence on the children.

Various family related problems are described by each of the participants in relation to their decision to leave school.

Lack of Financial Support

For Kinzang, Dorji, Lhendup, and Paydey, their family problems were related to financial problems and the need to look for a job. While Kinzang, Dorji and Lhendup left school to help bring in extra income for their families and provide education for their younger brothers and sisters, Paydey left school to support her parents who needed help financially. Following is how Kinzang, Dorji and Lhendup explain:

My father had retired from his job and he thought that it would be better if I left school and helped him support my younger brothers and sisters. I was the eldest in the family; therefore, it was my responsibility to get a job and help support my parents and siblings. So that's why I had to leave school, in order to get a job (Kinzang, personal interview).

I left school because I am the eldest in the family and I felt it was my duty to help my mother in supporting the family. I felt obliged, especially after my father died. My mother has been struggling to support us. So I thought that I would look for a job to support them financially (Dorji, personal interview).

I am the eldest in the family and I have many brothers and sisters. My parents are old and they needed my help to support the family. Actually I always wanted to study more but I thought that it was my duty to help my parents in times of need. So I decided to look for a job and educate my brothers and sisters (Lhendup, personal interview).

For Paydey, it was the need to look for a job to support her parents financially which made her leave school.

My father had lost his job and there was no one to provide for the family. The situation at home had become bad and I left school to help my parents financially because no one in my family works. I felt that it was my duty and I owe it to them (Paydey, personal interview).

Lack of Family Support

For Penjore and Lham, lack of family support was the main reason for their having left school. When there is a lack of family support, children tend to feel neglected and they tend to be frustrated and cannot concentrate on their studies which eventually discourages them and they leave school.

I had a step father who was very mean and I was made to work like a servant and I couldn't get any time to study. I felt pressured with my studies and my family problems. Therefore, I couldn't study any more. He chased me from my house and I was left with nothing. No house and no one to take care of me. I became homeless and I had to look for a job to support myself. My life is ruined by my stepfather by not letting me study. I had to leave half way because there was nobody to pay for my expenses (Penjore, personal interview).

Since I don't have a father my mother couldn't support me. I had to stay with my brothers and sisters. They were not very encouraging because they had their own families. My mother and I were at their mercy and they were never very encouraging. We were an extra burden for them and they never bothered with us. There was a lot of tension and too much pressure. So I thought it was best for me to leave school and get a job so that I [didn't] have to depend on them (Lham, personal interview).

For all these students who had family-related problems, getting a job was one of the foremost things they talked about doing as soon as they left school.

B. School-Related Problems

Students who find school to be boring, monotonous and very stressful tend to lose interest in their studies. Students also tend to lose interest in studies when the school fails to meet the needs and interests of the students. These students who have lost interest in studies tend to get into problems with the rules and regulations of the school. Breaking the rules and regulations of the school is considered a major offence and is a serious matter. It is considered very disrespectful and improper according to the code and conduct of the school. The offender is usually given three chances, a warning for the first time, probably suspension with notice to parents the second time, and finally if the offence is repeated for the third time, then the student is expelled. Expulsion is the last resort for any disciplinary problem occurring in schools.

Labelling Students

Cheten found school to be boring, monotonous and very stressful. His interest was more geared towards extra-curricular activities. He loved singing, playing on the guitar, doing sports and playing basketball, but in school he never got the opportunity to develop his talents. When school failed to recognize his talents, he started losing interest in studies and getting into problems by breaking the rules and regulations of the school. He found that school put more emphasis on studies and did not recognize his talents. So by going against the rules and regulations, he gained attention from his teachers which unfortunately got him into trouble with the school. Cheten states:

I lost interest in studies because school was boring and too stressful. It was so monotonous. Always study, study and study. I don't like the rules and regulations. I always got into trouble with the rules and regulations and was always taken to the principal. I was labelled as the troublemaker of the school and I felt humiliated. The teachers didn't like me and always found fault in me. They only like students who were good and never encouraged me to study hard. I was also weak in studies, especially math and Dzongkha. I was afraid that I might be expelled from school or I might not pass my exams. So before any of these things happened I decided to leave school. I was not very happy and I was bored and did not enjoy school life. I felt restricted and watched like a prisoner (Cheten, personal interview).

Tandin, had a fairly similar reason for leaving school. Tandin was expelled from school due to disciplinary problems and Cheten couldn't cope with the rules and regulations of the school.

I was expelled from school because I couldn't cope with the rules and regulations. I was sniffing glue and I couldn't concentrate in my studies. I was considered a bad influence on the other students by the principal and the teachers, so I was expelled from school (Tandin, personal interview).

Tandin and Cheten were labelled as the troublemakers and felt restricted as they were always watched with suspicion. This kind of treatment from the school further contributed to a loss of self-esteem in the students.

Loss of Self-Esteem

When a student is found breaking the rules and regulations of the school, he or she is considered to be problematic and generally a label is attached to that person as the troublemaker. That particular student becomes well known amongst the teachers and most of the time is discussed in general staff meetings. Often, schools tend to use humiliation as a means of discipline and the student is called in front of the school gathering and asked to talk about what he has done and to apologize in front of the whole school. When students feel humiliated, they tend to lose their self-esteem and cannot concentrate on studies. The only way they can escape such humiliation is by leaving school. Cheten explains how he was humiliated in front of the school:

My school had put on a show and I had an item to be presented. So finally when it was my turn to present my item, the teacher on duty just cancelled my item and I was not given the chance to perform. I was so excited about it and had put in a lot of effort practicing for it. So when it was cancelled at the last moment without any explanation, I was so embarrassed and humiliated that in anger I charged the teacher. I was going to fight with him for being so mean. The teacher reported this to the principal and I was given a last warning and asked to apologize in front of the school and was made to cut grass for 2 weeks as a punishment. They never gave me a chance to explain and I was really frustrated. I felt really humiliated and I thought the school was not being fair. I just wanted to leave school immediately (Cheten, personal interview).

Lack of Support from Teachers

Kinga and Penjore found school to be very impersonal. They found that teachers did not meet their personal needs and were devastated to find that school did not support them in times of need. There was a lack of support from the teachers and they lost their respect for school. The teachers failed to understand the inter-personal and intra-personal problems in the students' personal lives. Teachers couldn't relate the effects of family problems to school problems. They saw them as separate entities and did not think that it was their place to intervene. These students who had so much hope in their teachers were disappointed by their teachers' attitudes and lack of support. This is how Kinga and Penjore explain their having left school:

My problems at home were affecting my performance in school and I was having problems with my attendance. I did not have proper shoes or a uniform to wear in school. My teachers did not seem to understand my problems, instead they were always pressuring me for an explanation of my absenteeism and to come properly dressed to school. I tried explaining my problems at home to one of my teachers but he just said, "That's your home problem and you should try to deal with it yourself, there is nothing I can do about it." I felt really frustrated at the thought that the teachers did not bother with us or understand us. We look at them with so much respect and hope and when they can not understand our problems we lose respect for them too. I was warned several times and when I couldn't take it any more I just stopped going to school (Penjore, personal interview).

I was in need of some pocket money and there was no response from my parents. So I wanted to go home and get some myself. When I went to ask for permission to go home, I wasn't granted permission. I was frustrated and angry with the school, so I decided to run away from school without permission but with an intention to come back. But I was not allowed to come back unless I brought my parents. My parents couldn't come, so I decided to stay back home (Kinga, personal interview).

Low academic achievement

Failing is another common reason shared by some of the participants for their leaving school. Lham and Pemo explain failing as their reason for leaving school because they couldn't qualify for the next grade. Failing made it easier for them to exit from the academic milieu to pursue their personal interests, for example, being independent. Pemo was discouraged to continue her studies because she was weak in mathematics and science. She thought that it would be a waste of time for her because she had lost her interest in these two subjects. She had problems with the teacher who taught these particular subjects and had problems learning the concepts and other subjects. For grade promotion, a student must pass in one of these two subjects. Failing in both the subjects results in the student not being promoted to the next grade. A couple of other students also mentioned being weak in mathematics and science. Generally, most of the Bhutanese teachers who teach high school seem to have less preparation particularly in mathematics and science, academically and professionally, although now the academic qualification is being considered important for teaching. It is evident that there is a lack of science and math teachers in the country and they cannot provide individual attention to students. Students who experience difficulty do not get the help they need. In some cases, the qualifications of the teachers also seem to affect the students' ability to understand these two subjects. Most of the students in

Bhutan seem to be having problems in learning these two subjects. Pemo explains her fear:

I left school because I couldn't get through my class ten exam. I failed in math and science. The teacher himself did not know some of the things he was teaching. I was encouraged to leave because I know that I will never be able to get through these two subjects. I lost interest in these two subjects after I had very bad experiences with the subject teacher. This teacher knew that I was weak in these two subjects and he did not do anything about it. He always used to make fun of my being weak in the subjects and always said that math and science were not for girls. He used to say that I should be home looking after kids [rather] than learning the subjects. I know I will never be able to learn these two subjects and it will be a waste of time to do so. His comments were very discouraging and I will never be able to forget them (Pemo, personal interview).

Pemo lost interest in mathematics and science not only because she found them difficult but also because of the teacher's attitude. The teacher used humiliation as a means to get back at her for being weak in his subjects. He embarrassed her in front of the whole class and she found it very discouraging. Humiliation is used by many teachers with students who struggle with the subjects, to get back at students who seem to act smart with them, or when students seem to disrespect them by talking back.

After I failed in my exam, it made it easier for me to leave school. I was weak in math and science and I wasn't sure whether I would pass in these two subjects even if I repeated. I wish we had teachers who would make learning science simpler and more interesting. It was a very difficult subject and the teachers did not make it any simpler. Anyway, I wasn't very interested in continuing my studies due to my problems at home. Teachers in school were very strict and they never bothered to understand the students' personal problems. There was not much interaction with the teachers outside the classroom. Some of them were very partial and unapproachable. I would prefer teachers who are more friendly and approachable (Lham, personal interview).

I found math very difficult and the teacher very boring. So I lost interest in the subject (Cheten, personal interview).

I was weak in math and science and could never understand his teaching. He always seemed to be in a hurry and used to get angry when we asked questions. So we used to get scared of asking questions (Kinzang, personal interview).

There wasn't any subject that I particularly found difficult except for math and science. I used to concentrate in math but never could learn the tricks in learning how to master it. I found it difficult to learn math because we had a very big class and the teacher couldn't give us individual attention (Lhendup, personal interview).

In Lhendup's case, he was part of a big class so he couldn't get the attention that he needed from his teachers. The size of a class is often large due to the increase in the number of students attending school now. With large classes, it is very difficult for the teacher to provide individual attention. Usually the number of students in a classroom

varies from 45 to 65 students, so it is difficult for the teacher to attend to each individual student.

I was weak in math because I did not have a good foundation in math. The teachers kept on changing now and then, so I found it very difficult to adjust to the teaching styles of the teachers since they kept on changing. I used to feel quite frustrated because I used to try so hard to understand this particular subject. So when I was unable to improve I lost interest in the subject (Dorji, personal interview).

Dorji did not do well in math because his learning was hampered by the change of teachers every now and then. Some schools do experience an acute shortage of teachers and a lot of inconvenience is caused as a result. Students take time to adjust to the teaching styles of the teachers and when there are frequent disruptions, they tend to have difficulty in learning and thus lose interest.

Lack of Encouragement From Teachers

Paydey had similar experiences to Pemo and Lham. She found the teachers very indifferent to the students' learning capabilities. She was weak in Dzongkha, the national language, because she had done her early education outside the country and could hardly read and write her national language. Dzongkha is a very important subject and in order to be promoted to the next grade it is mandatory to pass it. Paydey had experienced repeated failure because she couldn't pass Dzongkha. She found teachers not very encouraging and instead humiliated her for trying so hard. This is how Paydey describes her experiences in school:

I was good in [other subjects] . . . but poor in Dzongkha. Really poor. The teacher knew that I was weak in Dzongkha but he never did anything to help me. He wouldn't say anything even if I copied homework and presented it to him. He used to say, "Oh, you don't know anything, you can copy. You are wasting time, you should stay home and give birth, you could have been a mother of two kids." So when I experienced repeated failure in this subject I was discouraged from continuing my studies (Paydey, personal interview).

Peer Pressure

Lhaden had also failed, and she thought that it would be very embarrassing for her to repeat in the same grade as her sister, who was studying in the same school. She wanted to continue her studies in a different school if she was granted a *Considered Pass*, generally known as *CP*. The system of *CP* was introduced in the schools a few years ago to meet the pass percentage directed by the Education Department. This system promotes those students who have the potential to improve themselves. Lhaden explains it this way:

Because I failed in class nine I couldn't stay back in the same school. I thought of joining other school but I was not granted a *CP*, so I couldn't join another school in class ten. I wanted to study in class ten rather than repeating the same grade again. But repeating in the same school with my younger sister was not what I would have preferred because I would have been very much embarrassed. I would feel very old so I decided to leave school. Students and friends have teased me for being the oldest in the class and I [didn't] want to go through it again. I had already repeated three times in different grades and I was quite fed up

with repeating. Being weak in studies was another reason why I wanted to leave school (Lhaden, personal interview).

Pass For Training

Class eight students have to sit for the external examination set by the Bhutan Board of Examinations and class ten students have to sit for the external examination set by the Indian Council Secondary Education. A ceiling for promoting students to the next grade is set for all of the schools in accordance with the availability of seats and the general performance of the students enrolled in these two classes. Students obtaining the pass percentage are promoted to the next class, whereas those who have not obtained the pass percentage but have just passed, are disqualified from being promoted to the next grade. These students are considered “passed for training”, which means they are qualified to join some training institute within the country but not be promoted to the next grade. If they want to continue their studies, they have to repeat the same grade which most do not want to do. Students go through a lot of frustration and eventually leave school and go for some training rather than wasting another year repeating the same class they had actually passed. Dorji brings out this issue:

I was disqualified and got a pass for training. I actually wanted to continue my studies but I [didn't] want to repeat the same grade which I [had] passed. Who knows I might fail if I repeat, so instead I thought I should go for training [rather] than waste my time repeating the same grade (Dorji, personal interview).

Dorji did not want to take the risk of repeating the same class again for fear of failing. He thought it was wise to go for some training which he could get with his qualification. He did not want to repeat the same grade which he had actually passed. Most of the participants mentioned having lost interest in school due to some of the school- related problems that they had experienced. These problems included being weak in studies, school being very stressful and demanding, not being encouraged by the teachers, an inability to cope with the rules and regulations, fear of embarrassment, and teacher attitude. There is no doubt that the schools in Bhutan do try to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning. However, through circumstances like the large number of students, an acute teacher shortage, the vast syllabus, the system of screening students through examination, and maintaining school discipline, the process of fulfilling this objective is often hindered.

C. Personal-Related Problems

Other than the family related problems and school-related problems, leaving school early was also related to students' personal problems, including being far away from home, pregnancy, health problems, traditional beliefs, age factors and peer influence.

Being Far Away From Home

Most of the schools, particularly boarding schools, are located far away from towns in order to avoid disciplinary problems which might be caused due to the influence of the town. Students who are used to town life and those who come from very far away places seem to suffer from homesickness and have problems adjusting to the rules and regulations of the school. But most of the parents think boarding school is an appropriate place to leave their children, since it is cost effective and implies less responsibility for them. For middle and lower income families, sending their children

to a boarding school is very cost-effective, and for working parents, it means less responsibility. Some of the students go to a boarding school between the ages of 12 and 18 years, so for these students it means a big adjustment from their regular home life to a scheduled way of life in school. Students who cannot adjust to the routine of school life suffer from being very homesick and cannot concentrate on their studies.

The students in the boarding school stay there for nine months and they go home for the remaining three months of the year. Most parents think that after they have admitted their child into a boarding school, it is the school's responsibility to look after them until they leave school. Some of the parents never visit their children while they are in school, thus adding to the feelings of homesickness. Students in boarding school love to have a lot of pocket money and eatables, as they tend to be hungry most of the time. When parents fail to send them pocket money and parcels, they feel restless, neglected and the desire to go home increases. Thus, students with less patience and self-control, tend to have the desire to go home more often than the others. But on the other hand, schools follow their rules and do not allow students to leave school during the academic year without the permission of the guardian or without a good reason. Therefore, students tend to play truant. This is how Kinga explains how he felt:

I wasn't happy in school. I didn't hear anything from home . . . and didn't receive any pocket money. Food in school is not delicious, so I wanted some money to buy some necessities and some eatable items. In school we are always hungry and always look forward to getting parcels and pocket money from home. But it didn't happen to me and I was really homesick. I couldn't concentrate on my studies and wanted to go home. But the school did not grant me permission to go home so I ran away from school. Also, school was very far away from my home and I secretly wanted to change my school if I could get a seat in a school in Thimphu, near my parents (Kinga, personal interview).

Kinga's need for some pocket money and eatables in school was very important. When he did not receive any pocket money and eatables from home like his other more fortunate friends, he felt very homesick and couldn't concentrate on his studies. He was also more used to town life since his parents lived in town. For him, adjusting to the remote surroundings of the school was difficult. He wanted to study in town and be near his parents. He looked for opportunities to go home but when he wasn't granted permission to go home, he decided to run away from school.

Dorji was not encouraged to stay in school because it was very far away from his home and he missed home very much. The fact that he was far away from his family made him feel very home-sick. He worried about his parents and these feelings affected his studies. Dorji describes his feelings:

School was very far away from my home town and I was always worried about my parents. They couldn't come and meet me because of many reasons. The weather was another factor, it was either always raining or foggy or humid. There were a lot of leeches and I was very scared of leeches. The weather made me feel sad and gloomy and it was difficult to concentrate on studies too (Dorji, personal interview).

Pregnancy

Pregnancy is not a new experience in the Bhutanese education system. There are many young teenage mothers. Some of them have had to give up their education and a promising future for one costly mistake. Pregnancy while in school is a big embarrassment for the parents, the school, and the individual person. Pregnancy is

considered very shameful because it draws the attention of the society. It is usually very degrading for the family and the school because it affects the reputation of the school and the family. The reputation of the school is known by its academic results and the discipline. The family reputation is also influenced by the behaviour of the children and pregnancy before marriage is a big embarrassment for the parents. The other reasons for pregnancy being very embarrassing could be because sex is still not talked about very freely or frequently in the schools or in the family. It is still considered to be a taboo subject although now the Ministry of Health and Education has started providing sex education in the schools and the general public. However, sex is still not talked about freely in families and what little the children know about it comes from school. The major responsibility of teaching sex education to students is bestowed upon the schools by the parents and society. Parents do discourage their children from indulging in sex before marriage for the reason that it affects the reputation of the family.

Usually a pregnant student leaves school voluntarily or is asked to leave school because it is against the code and conduct of the school. Especially in boarding schools, students do not come back after giving birth and in most cases it is the end to their education. Many of the schools still haven't started accepting pregnant girls in school, although some of the schools are now starting to change their perception. Lham puts it this way:

I was pregnant by my boyfriend and I was not able to concentrate on my studies because I was scared and troubled by my situation. Luckily no one knew about me so I was able to do my exam. If the school authorities had come to know about it I would have been expelled because it is an improper behaviour in school. I needed emotional and financial support since I did not get any from home , (Lham, personal interview).

Lham was not ready to talk about her pregnancy to anybody because she felt it was not proper and also because she knew that if the school authorities came to know about it she would not be allowed to sit for her examination. She kept it a secret and meanwhile couldn't concentrate on her studies because she was too worried.

Health Problems

Generally, repeated illness does affect the performance of a child at school. If the illness is persistent and the student misses a lot of classes, the student is either asked to repeat the class on health grounds or it is left to the individual to decide whether or not to sit for the examinations. Kinzang felt her own poor health and her mother's influence on her were reasons which encouraged her to leave school. Having health problems hampered Kinzang's studies as she had to miss a lot of classes. She was not interested in repeating in the same school and couldn't continue in other schools due to the unavailability of seats. At the same time, her family had financial problems and her parents found it convenient to have her home since it would help them financially. She explains her leaving school:

Due to my illness I had missed a lot of classes and my performance in studies had gone down too. I was hospitalized several times and I couldn't catch up with my studies. When I became better I tried looking for a new school but I couldn't get admission in the school I wanted to study. So I thought it would be best to look for a job (Kinzang, personal interview).

Traditional Beliefs

The traditional belief of a woman's role as the 'homemaker' is still evident in many families which causes many girls to leave school early. Most families believe that for a girl it is not very important to be well educated because the man is considered to be the bread-winner of the family. Most Bhutanese girls choose to stay home after marriage and take care of the children while their husbands earn money to care for them. Children coming from poor educational backgrounds or having parents who are illiterate seem to have developed this attitude. Most of the parents do not seem to encourage their daughters in their academic performance as much as they would their sons. Many girls in the schools do not aspire to being well educated because of this traditional belief and this kind of perception seems to have stemmed from their parents' attitudes towards gender. Kinzang explains:

When I started becoming frequently ill my mother wanted me to stop studying. She thought that girls need not have very high qualification because after marriage it becomes useless. I thought that what she said made sense because for girls it is not necessary to be so qualified, because it is the man who supports the family after marriage. For a woman I thought it was alright to look for a job with my qualifications when it was available and be of some help to my parents (Kinzang, personal interview).

This traditional belief is prevalent in Kinzang's family and seems to have a strong influence on her. Due to her parents' poor educational backgrounds and her mother's strong influence on her, she did not aspire to being well educated. She also lacked proper guidance from her parents.

Age Factor

Most students start school late and repeated failing seems to discourage them to complete school. When students feel that they are too old for a class, they seem to feel embarrassed to be amongst younger classmates. Often, they are teased by their friends and are given nicknames like, *Angyem*, which means grandmother, for girls, and *Agay*, which means grandfather, for boys. They seem to get a lot of pressure from their friends and generally students think that to be in school after a certain age is embarrassing.

I had friends who were already working and they encouraged me to leave school when jobs were still available with my qualifications. I thought that continuing studies would be a waste of time especially when I was not very good in studies. I was already 23 years old then and I still had not finished my class ten. My friends told me that it would be very embarrassing to repeat school with people far younger than me. I couldn't imagine the embarrassment that I would be going through, so I listened to my friends' advice (Lhaden, personal interview).

Lhaden felt embarrassed due to her age, which encouraged her to leave school. She was discouraged because her school peers were now four grades ahead of her.

Peer Influence

Peer influence was another factor participants suggested which made them to leave school. Pemo had friends who were already working and doing well. She was

encouraged by the idea of having independence and the freedom experienced by these working friends. Pemo explains it this way:

I was encouraged to leave school and get into a job by my friends. Most of them had also dropped out from class eight and joined service. They have been getting frequent chances to go outside the country, for short training. I used to admire them going to work and being independent. So during my winter holidays I worked as a tour guide and I was fascinated by the amount of tips I got. It would have taken me ages to get that amount of money and here I am making it within a day. So I was encouraged to leave school (Pemo, personal interview).

For Paydey, it was being in Thimphu and the kind of friends she had which encouraged her to leave school. She had friends who were not interested in studies but liked partying and having a lot of fun. She enjoyed being with those kinds of friends and most of them were out of school and just hanging around. She explains:

Most of my friends had left school after having failed. They were never serious with studies and liked partying a lot. My friends' way of life encouraged me to leave school. While I was with them they made me forget all my family problems. Being in Thimphu was another reason, because there are a lot of distractions and too many facilities and it is more enjoyable than being in school (Paydey, personal interview).

Cheten and Tandin had friends who were already into drugs and they were influenced by them to take drugs. For Cheten, it was support and the acceptance from his friends that encouraged him to be in the group and the need for him to be like one of them. Cheten explains it this way:

I was bored with school, and my friends who were already out of school provided me the consolation that I needed. I was introduced to drugs by them and I felt happy when I was in their company. I felt accepted in their group and to belong to the group I started taking drugs and I got hooked on it. After that I lost interest in school and started having problems with the school (Cheten, personal interview).

Similarly, Tandin states:

My friends wanted me to try sniffing glue. At first I hesitated but they jeered at me and called me a coward. They said that it would make me forget all my problems and make me happy. I was taken in by their words and I tried it for the first time. I liked it, it made me forget everything and slowly I got hooked on it. Then I started losing interest in studies and couldn't concentrate and had problems with the discipline of the school (Tandin, personal interview).

During the interviews, it became evident that there were similarities and differences in participants' experiences which had led them to leave school early. The most prominent reasons that influenced students to leave school seem interwoven with the family, school and personal problems of the student.

The next section will explore and expand upon the effects of early school leaving on the individual's life.

II. Effects of Early School Leaving

While talking to the participants about their perception about early school leaving, they also described their feelings after having left school and how that decision has affected them. The descriptions of their feelings revealed the depth of their attitude towards schools and how they are coping with their lives now. It was a really good opportunity for me to have met my participants and listened to their words because it brought about a new perspective for understanding the variables involved in leaving school early.

Regret

Most of the students talked about a deep sense of regret for having left school and showed enthusiasm for going back to school if there were any opportunities to do so. Some differences in the attitudes of the students could be seen between those who left school due to the various reasons mentioned above. Students who left school because they lost interest in studies were happy to leave school and be out of the system. However, in coming to terms with the realities of life, they seemed to regret having left school.

Kinga's immediate feeling after he left school was that he felt happy and relieved to be free from the school's rules and regulations. He also felt a sense of achievement for being able to go against the rules and regulations of the school. Now he regrets leaving for he is not able to get a job that pays well. He realizes that qualifications are important to get these jobs. He would like to go back to school if given a chance.

I regret not having studied. When I left school I was very naive and innocent and was easily influenced by my friends. At that particular moment I felt great being able to do what others couldn't do. I was not aware of what was going to happen to me after leaving school. I am suffering for my stupid deeds. I worked as a sales person for sometime but I did not like the job because I was paid very low and now I am looking for another job. Now I am aware that these days with my qualifications I can't get a decent job. I am thinking of completing my class eight and getting a certificate so that I can get into training (Kinga, personal interview).

Paydey was relieved to be out of school and thought it was a break from the rules and regulation of the school. Since she couldn't get a good job, she intended to stay home and help her mother. She now thinks that she should have continued her studies and regrets having left school. Leaving school has helped develop in her an inferiority complex because of her low qualification. She explains:

Immediately after I left school I felt nice and free. It was a good break from the teachers and the rules and regulations of the school. But now I feel I should have continued my studies. I stay at home and I find it very boring and it has made me very dull and miserable. I have started developing an inferiority complex and I feel that I don't know anything. I can't concentrate on anything. I wish I could go back to school. Now I have realized that qualifications are important (Paydey, personal interview).

Lhendup and Dorji also regret having left school, for they always wanted to be well educated so that they could better help their parents. Dorji is looking for a job in

Thimphu so that he can perhaps meet the important people who would recognize him and credit him for his hard work.

Actually I didn't want to leave school. I felt very sad because of the fact that my qualifications are small and secondly I thought that my friends would be in a better position than me because of my qualifications. I really regret having to leave school. I am not sure what kind of a job I will be getting and I need to find a job to support my family. I am at present looking for a job in Thimphu. I want to work in Thimphu since Thimphu is the capital city I feel I will get a chance to be acquainted with the higher officers so that I will have a better chance of getting opportunities (Dorji, personal interview).

Similarly, Lhendup has also left his village and come to Thimphu to look for a job. He supports his parents and siblings with his salary. He has a great desire to continue his studies and hopes that one day he will be able to. He envies his friends who have continued their studies. This is how Lhendup expresses his feelings:

When I left school I felt like crying. I thought that I would really miss school a lot. I still miss school a lot and when I meet friends I feel very sad and envy them. Now I have a job in Thimphu and with it I support my parents and my brothers and sisters. I would like to go back to school one day. Leaving school was my greatest mistake but there was nothing I could do, it had to be this way (Lhendup, personal interview).

Job Dissatisfaction

Most of the students who have left school and are presently working seem to be experiencing dissatisfaction with their jobs. They had a misconception about the availability of jobs and thought that a job was easy to find. Most of them were looking for a job that would pay them well, so when they couldn't find one with their qualification they regretted having left school early.

Pemo also felt a sense of freedom immediately after she left school and hoped that she would get a job and do well like her friends who were already in job. Now that she is married and has a job, she realizes that it is not easy to get a good job without a good qualification. She is not satisfied with her job and envies her friends who are pursuing higher studies. Due to the lack of information on the availability of jobs, her perception of jobs was based on her friends' information.

At first it was relaxing and I felt very free to move about because in the school we were kept very strict. Later I realized that freedom is not everything. Now I regret having left school without [completing] my studies. My friends who have continued with their studies are doing very well and getting professional jobs and I am regretting it. Now I am working as a tour guide and I am married (Pemo, personal interview).

Lhaden had a similar perception about the availability of jobs. Now she is not satisfied with the job she has and regrets having left school. She also hopes to go back to school and get qualifications enough for a well paying job.

When I left school I thought that I would get a job very easily with my qualifications but now I realize that to get a good job you need to be qualified. I have a job now but I am not satisfied with it. I find it boring to be in a job which does not give me any satisfaction. I would go back to school if I am given a chance (Lhaden, personal interview).

Life Satisfaction

Although Kinzang regrets having left school, he feels satisfied because he has been able to help his parents by getting a job. Being able to help his parents in times of need has given him a deep sense of satisfaction and achievement. He works in Thimphu and sends money to his parents in his village.

I did not want to leave school. I felt sad to leave school because all my friends would be studying more and I will be least qualified. I was aware that it was easier to get a job if I had good qualifications. I always wanted to do well and have a good job. I never imagined that I would be leaving school incomplete one day. But now I have a job and I am able to help my parents and that gives me a sense of satisfaction (Kinzang, personal interview).

Penjore regrets having left school but he had no options since he had no means to support himself. He is happy, and glad to have a job and be independent. He wants to save enough money so that he will be able to go back to school one day.

I felt very sad to leave school and felt that my life was gone. I felt empty, lost, desolate and unhappy. But what to do, I had no choice. I think it is my fate. But at least I have a job and I can look after myself. I don't mind working as a sales person and I am happy with the pay. I hope to save enough money so that I can study again (Penjore, personal interview).

Marriage

Many students, especially girls, tend to get married after they leave school. Most of the girls marry at a young age for various reasons including being provided with financial and emotional support.

Lham is married and has a family. She doesn't have a job at present but hopes to find one very soon. She did initially regret leaving school but now she feels satisfied. She also had a misconception about the availability of jobs and thought that it was easy to get a job that she would enjoy.

Now I don't regret much because I am married and have a family. But immediately after I left school I regretted it a lot. I thought by leaving school I would be able to get a job and be independent. But I was wrong because without good qualifications it is difficult to get a good job. I still do not have a job but I wish to complete my school and then get into a training program and get a job (Lham, personal interview).

Substance Abuse

Cheten left school because he couldn't cope with the school's rules and regulations. Immediately after he left school, he felt great relief. He enjoyed his freedom and hung around with his friends who were already using drugs and were unemployed. He has been using drugs frequently since he left school and at present he has a temporary job but still hangs around with his friends for support. He has difficulty in leading a productive life and thinks he is too old to go back to school. This is how he explains:

I was very happy to leave school because I felt free from the rules and regulations of the school. I could go anywhere and do anything that I wanted to do with my friends. I have been taking drugs with my friends and I enjoy being with my friends. For one year I was doing nothing. I was just hanging around and having fun. But now my brother-in-law [has] given me a temporary job and I am working presently. But I still hang around with my friends and I like doing it. I want to go back to school but I feel too old to go back to school (Cheten, personal interview).

Legal Problems

Tandin was not really happy to leave school because he was expelled from school due to disciplinary problems. He was already abusing drugs at the time he was expelled from school. Being expelled from school has a stigma attached to it. He had problems adjusting to the idea of being a misfit in society. Therefore, he resorted to stealing to make ends meet which put him into further trouble with the law. Several times he was put in jail for stealing. Now he regrets having left school and, given a chance, he wants to go back to school. He explains:

I was not actually happy having to leave school. I did not want to leave school but since I was expelled I could not do anything. I feel that I have lost a golden chance, and I would give up anything to be able to go back to school. After I was expelled from school I went back to my village and everyone thought that I was bad and dangerous. Everyone kept away from me and that angered me, so to get back at them I started stealing money. I was caught by the police several times and put in jail several times. Of course I feel ashamed of myself but that was the only way I could survive. Given a chance I would like to go back to school and study again. I regret my mistakes but what could be done, it was my fate. I should have realized it earlier (Tandin, personal interview)

III. What Could Have Kept Them In School

While talking to my participants, they mentioned some of the things that could have kept them in school. Most of the students thought that schools could have done something to help them complete their studies, and they view teachers as the main people to help them with their problems. Most of these students thought that schools lacked some kind of a helping programme, such as detecting problems, providing help and advice to those who need it. They thought that their teachers were unapproachable. They mentioned that if teachers were more open and more friendly, they could have been able to talk to them about their problems and get help. Most of the time they thought that personal problems were not discussed in school and therefore, they were not able to talk to their teachers. Some students also mentioned the cut off points for the external examinations as a discouraging factor, especially for those who are weak in academics. Some students talked about the need for involvement of every parent in the day-to-day activities of the school. Schools held parents' meetings and parents' days to inform the parents about the activities of the school and also to give information on students' performance; however, it is not compulsory for all parents to attend. Some parents cannot attend because they are busy, some live in far away places, and some are just not interested. These parents lack information on their children's performance and cannot guide their children properly. Some students mentioned the strict rules and regulations of the school. The following are some of the issues my participants thought could have helped them stay in school.

Recognizing Talents And Interest Of Students

Some of my participants brought out the importance of recognizing students' interests and talents for making school interesting and keeping students in school. They thought that schools did not take any initiative in this regard, thereby, making them feel bored, restless and neglected. They felt that they were not given any opportunity to develop their talents and interests. Cheten states:

I am sure I would have never left school and would have been a good student, if there was some way of improving my talents or if there was some way of developing my interests (Cheten, personal interview).

Cheten felt that if his school had provided an opportunity to develop his talents, he would have found school interesting. Other than studies, there was nothing to keep him occupied in school. His innate talents were not recognized, therefore, he resorted to other means of self-gratification.

Kinga thought that school lacked enough facilities to make the school experience interesting. Such facilities would have kept him busy and occupied.

If I had more facilities like different indoor and outdoor games in school, it would have kept me busy. I don't think I would have been bored and homesick. School would [be] . . . fun and a better place to live (Kinga, personal interview).

Issue of the Qualifying Percentage for the next Higher Grade

Students think that the cut off point for the external examination is a discouraging factor for weaker students. The increase in the population of students appearing at the external examination with the limited number of seats for the next grade increases the requirement of academic percentage to qualify for it. The qualifying percentage is directly proportional to the number of students passing and the number of seats available for the next grade. Therefore, it discourages academically weak students from studying hard. Dorji had been discouraged by the qualifying percentage for the next grade because he was weak in studies. He feels that he would have been encouraged to try harder if he had seen a possibility of getting through his external examination.

If the cut off point in the external examination was lower then it may not have been very discouraging. I would not have given up so easily. I would [have] thought of going for further studies (Dorji, personal interview).

Cheten sees the qualifying percentage as inconsistent and higher than his achievement level. Therefore, he was discouraged,

If the cut off point in external examinations was lower I would have been encouraged to try but because it kept on changing I was discouraged (Cheten, personal interview).

Lham had also given up hopes of doing well in her studies because she was discouraged by the pass percentage set by the external examination. She feels that if the qualifying percentage was lower she would have been encouraged to do well and would have continued her studies.

I wish the cut off point for going for higher studies were lower than what it is. In order to go for higher studies we have to get certain percentage. If it was lower it would have encouraged me to study hard and I would have got chances to continue my studies and go for further studies (Lham, personal interview).

Teacher Attitudes

Most of the participants had a general opinion that teachers were not understanding, friendly, or approachable. Thus, students were not able to go for help when they had problems. Cheten states:

If the teachers were more understanding, patient and were able to give guidance at the appropriate times, I would have done very well in my studies and behaviour (Cheten, personal interview).

He did not find his teachers very understanding and patient, and thinks that if they had given him proper guidance at the appropriate time, it could have kept him in school.

Lham explains her situation:

I also feel that if the teachers were more open and friendlier then I could have talked to them about my problems and got some guidance from them. It would have helped me from leaving school (Lham, personal interview).

She also mentions her expectations of her teachers. She found them unapproachable and unfriendly and was intimidated by them. She believes that if her teachers exhibited friendliness and understanding then she would have been able to talk to them and received some help. Unfortunately, it didn't happen in her case.

Lhaden feels:

I would have stayed in school if the school was more understanding and aware of the students' problems . . . helpful (Lhaden, personal interview).

Lhaden did not receive any support from her school. She thinks that her school did not attempt to understand her problems. Her request for a pass certificate was not granted by the school and she feels that if the school had tried to at least understand her problem, she would still be there.

Kinzang states,

It could have been much better if teachers were more approachable and not so distant. I was scared of my teachers (Kinzang, personal interview).

Kinzang also thought that the teachers were unapproachable and she was intimidated in their presence. She couldn't establish a proper relationship with her teachers because they instilled fear in her and she was never able to relate to them.

Similarly, Dorji states,

Teachers are busy and don't have time to listen to students' problems. So sometimes I feel neglected when they do not have time for us. Because in school we look upon teachers for everything and when they disappoint you, you feel terrible (Dorji, personal interview).

Dorji brings out the expectations he had of his teachers. He expected his teachers to be kind and sympathetic. In school, he relied on his teachers to guide him and help him in everything. When his expectations were not met, he felt very neglected and frustrated.

Teacher-Student Relationship

Some of the participants thought that the schools needed to improve the student-teacher relationship. A lack of interaction with the teachers after school hours made students think that teachers were not accessible when they had problems.

Lhendup offers his perception:

I couldn't talk frankly with my teachers about my problems, so the teachers couldn't help me. I feel if I had talked to them frankly I would have got some help from them. But the relation between the teachers and students should be improved. The teachers should be accessible to the students as and when they have problem and the teacher should be willing to listen to the students' problems. The school should understand the problems of the students and provide help and advice (Lhendup, personal interview).

He couldn't talk to his teachers frankly and feels that there should be a proper system of helping students with their problems. Such a system could have helped the students to share their problems and fears with an elder person they believed in.

I knew only those teachers who taught me. We are only familiar to those who teach us. The other teachers we see them only during the morning assembly and they don't come to our class because they don't teach us. So we can't get close to them. Therefore, it is difficult to get help from them. I feel it will be easier to talk to them than those who teach us. With those who teach us we don't feel very free to talk to them about our personal problems. There should be a system which could familiarize the teachers and students to bring them closer (Pemo, personal interview)

Pemo feels the need to know all the teachers irrespective of whether they teach a particular class or not. She feels that the teachers who do not teach her class could help students in their personal problems.

Lack Of Professional Help

Students felt that there was a lack of a proper helping system in school for students having problems. They longed for somebody who would be accessible to help them whenever they felt the need to talk.

Dorji feels:

If there was somebody to advise me during the time when I was planning to leave school, it could have at least guided me in making my decisions. If there was some sort of help provided after school especially in boarding school, I would have certainly been in school if such things had been there (Dorji, personal interview).

Dorji felt the lack of proper guidance from the teachers in times of need. He feels that if he had been able to talk to somebody in school about his decision, it would have helped him to at least be prepared.

Pemo also felt the need to talk to or confide in someone at school. Such a person was missing at school. She couldn't trust her teachers and did not feel comfortable confiding in them since they did not exhibit any comfort and friendliness. She explains:

If someone had tried to listen to my problems and guided me well, because now I realize that it is not necessary to like the teacher to like the subjects (Pemo, personal interview).

Paydey needed financial help but was not able to get it from schools. Schools do not have any programmes to support students having such problems. There are insufficient funds to do so. Although basic education is free, there are some parents who can not even afford to keep their children in school due to financial problems. Therefore, it is impossible to help students with such problems. She explains:

If there was somebody to help me with money, I think I would have stayed in school. At least if there was somebody to pay for my books and school fees that would have helped me a lot (Paydey, personal interview).

Tandin feels that expelling him from school didn't help him in getting on with his life. In fact, he had become a misfit in society which further aggravated his problems. He certainly feels that if his problems were detected earlier and something had been done about them, he would have been a better person with a brighter future.

Tandin explains:

If there was proper guidance and if my problem was detected earlier and something was done about it rather than sending me out of school . . . could have been different (Tandin, personal interview).

Penjore felt that if the school could have intervened in his home problem and talked to his stepfather, his future could have been saved. He felt schools did not intervene with the home problems. His problems at home were affecting his performance in school, including attendance, physical appearance, and academic performance. While such problems were obvious, he expected teachers to know his problems, but instead they blamed him for his performance and kept on warning him. Although he tried mentioning his home problems to his class teacher, it did not make any difference. He found his teacher very indifferent to his problems and the teacher did not want to interfere. He explains:

I wish that we had a law against child abuse by their parents. Teachers should be more aware of the students' problems and talk to the parents frequently. There should be communication between the teachers, students and parents. Inform the parents about the child's performance to the parents and the parents should actively participate in the school's activities. If those things were present in my school it would have solved my problems and I wouldn't have to leave school (Penjore, personal interview).

Parental Involvement In School Activities

Some students brought out the need for involving all the parents in the day-to-day activities of the school. They felt that some of their parents did not attend the parent-teacher meeting and were not aware of what was happening in school. They also felt the need for educating their parents and creating awareness in them. Kinzang explains:

My parents never went for the parent-teacher meeting, so they were not aware of what was happening in school and with me. If they had been involved then they would have a better understanding of my performance in school and together with my teachers they could have found a way to keep me in school (Kinzang, personal interview).

Kinzang feels the need for parental involvement in school because her parents never attended meetings held by the school and were never aware of her performance in school. She thinks that if her parents had been more aware of her performance and met with her teachers, they could have detected her illness before it became too late.

Introduce a system which would bring awareness in the parents about their children's performance in school. Educate parents in dealing with their children and give them advice. This could have helped not only me, but other children who are facing similar situations like me (Penjore, personal interview).

Penjore felt the need to educate all the parents who were mistreating their children. He also felt that parents should be contacted by the school if it is known that the child is lagging behind because of the home situation. He thought his parents would have certainly treated him well if the school had intervened. He felt that schools should have a system to educate parents who abuse their child. Such a system would not only provide support to the child but will improve the self-concept of the child.

Rules And Regulations Of Schools

Some students brought out the issue of having to cope with the strict rules and regulations of the school and the effect it had on them. They wished that the rules and regulations were milder and more reasonable.

I wish the rules and regulations were not very strict, because when the rules and regulations are very strict we feel like going against them (Kinga, personal interview).

Kinga mentions how his school's rules and regulations encouraged him to rebel. He found his school's rules and regulations very strict. He was homesick and wanted to go home but he was not granted leave by his school. His need to go home was really great and he could only do so by going against the rules and regulations of the school. This particular action was further encouraged by his group of friends. Most of the time students tend to operate in groups to break the rules that they don't like. Such behaviour is encouraged in the students when they feel frustrated at the strict rules and the regulations of the school. The only way they can get back at the authorities is by breaking the rules set by the school.

The . . . if the rules and regulations of my school [were] bearable, sensible and appropriate. I was pressured to behave well and follow . . . which was sometimes difficult to do. If the teachers had made you do all these things by making us understand, then it would have been better (Cheten, personal interview).

Cheten also found the rules and regulations of the school very strict. He comes from a family where he is the only son and was in fact a pampered child. He was not used to having a lot of rules and regulations since he always had his own way.

Class Size

Some students felt the need for more attention from their teachers in the classrooms. They thought that teachers were not able to provide enough attention to all of the students in the class.

If the number of students were smaller and the syllabus was not vast, teachers could have been able to provide more attention to the students (Penjore, personal interview)

Penjore was not able to get enough attention from his teachers because of the large number of students in his class and the vast syllabus which the teachers needed to cover for the external examination.

I would prefer fewer students in the classrooms because teachers can give more attention to us. Teachers were not able to give enough attention because of time limits and the vast syllabus. My teachers always reminded us of the time and the syllabus needed to be covered for the external exam. Therefore, slow learner like me were always neglected (Pemo, personal interview).

Pemo thinks that she did not get enough attention from her teachers because teachers couldn't waste their time on slow learners like her. The classroom size, limited time and the vast syllabus were seen as factors which aggravated the situation in the school.

Summary

Similarities and differences in the students' perspectives have been accented to understand their feelings. Factors such as family-related problems, school-related problems, being away from home, pregnancy, traditional beliefs, age factors, peer influence and health problems have contributed to students' leaving school early. Leaving school early has affected the students' lives in numerous ways. Students experienced personal problems such as regret, life satisfaction, early marriage, substance abuse, job dissatisfaction, and legal problems. Many of the students feel that schools could have done something to help keep them in school and they thought that teachers should be more open and available to help students.

Implications of Early School Leaving for Bhutan

Unlike the developed countries where educational opportunities for early school leavers appear to be abundant, for most students who leave school early in Bhutan, it is an end to their education. One reason for this is that students who leave school want to seek employment rather than study. Secondly, even if they want to go back to school, there is no opportunity to do so. Early school leavers in Bhutan have very few choices for jobs and, therefore, job satisfaction cannot be guaranteed. These students flock to the urban areas where there are job opportunities, leaving their homes in the villages and thus, increasing the rural-urban migration. Youth who are attracted by what they perceive as the glamour of urban living, and yet cannot afford the urban lifestyle, turn to crime, drugs, and prostitution. Although juvenile crime is not widespread in Bhutan, it is an unfortunate reality that young people are dropping out of school and leaving their village homes for the attraction of urban life. Unqualified for and unsuccessful in securing jobs, these youth are sometimes compelled to take to a life of crime. Amongst the growing concerns facing the development of education in Bhutan, one of the most significant is the increase in expectation for white-collar employment in the government. The preference is for office-related jobs no matter how

unproductive and low paying they may be. Therefore, there is a general reluctance to undertake any manual work amongst the youth today, which has further contributed to the emerging problems related to youth and rural-urban migration.

Students projecting behaviour problems in school are considered problematic and they are usually expelled from school according to the rules and regulations. Expulsion is the last resort to behaviour problems in school. Negative labels are attached to students who are expelled from school and it is a big embarrassment for the parents. The student faces rejection from school, parents and society. Students who are luckier than others sometimes get accepted by some schools on probation. For most of them, the alternative is to get a job, which brings an end to their education. These students lack the required qualifications to get accepted into training institutes. Students with psychological problems tend to develop low self-esteem and inferiority complexes. Students who cannot deal with their problems tend to resort to other means of self-gratification like drugs and crime.

Students who have left school after losing faith in and respect for schools and teachers develop a negative attitude towards life and have difficulty in coping with the expectations of the society. If allowed to persist, these early problems are carried on into adolescence and adulthood and cause pronounced problems both for the individuals and for society as a whole.

Exposure to western culture through media has caused Bhutanese students to become more aware and critical in their views. Students want something more than what the teachers can give. Students have started becoming critical and the hunger for knowledge beyond textbooks is evident. When schools fail to recognize their needs, students tend to lose interest and leave school or develop negative attitudes towards schools, causing disciplinary problems. Such behaviour in Bhutanese society is unacceptable and is considered rebellious. Therefore, students with rebellious behaviour are expelled from schools with bad records, which would be a blotch on their reference for a job or higher studies.

Although in Bhutan, early school leavers are welcomed in the hope that these children would go back to their villages as educated farmers. The Government of Bhutan desires and expects the people to understand its goal, "primary education for all", by the year 2000 which is an effort to develop the country by educating its people. But most of the children coming from the rural areas after leaving school do not go back to their villages to take up farming. Therefore, there is an increase in the rural-urban migration, especially with these children leaving their villages to look for jobs in the urban areas. While most of these early school leavers flock to the urban areas for employment, the villages are getting deserted and there is a decrease in the labour and production of agricultural goods.

In Bhutan, teenage pregnancy in the secondary high schools is still unacceptable. The result would be expulsion and an end to education. Moreover, Bhutanese women are fairly content because the responsibility of the family is shouldered by men and a family's property is inherited by the daughters. Therefore, the need to complete secondary high school for girls is not seen as compulsory by the parents. These factors also influence the attitudes of girls with respect to early school leaving.

Suggestions And Recommendations For Further Research

Although my study is neither representative nor generalizable, it provides significant insight into understanding these students' perspectives of early school leaving in Bhutan. It is clear from this study that there is a lot of work to be done in our schools in order to effectively confront issues of early school leaving.

The present study highlights the need for a larger and more intensive examination of early school leaving in Bhutan. Much more remains to be studied on this subject.

The decision to leave school doesn't take place in a single impulsive moment, rather, it is the culmination of a process that begins psychologically and emotionally long before entry into secondary school (Bearden, Spencer, & Morocco, 1989; Bhaerman & Kopp, 1988; Gastright, 1987; McMullan et al., 1988; Wittenberg, 1988). Future researchers should continue the study of early school leaving in Bhutan with special emphasis on the following issues:

- 1) A study should be conducted to identify risk factors for students such as age, health, family background, attendance, grades, retention, reading ability, social interaction, and motivation that lead to early school leaving at the junior high and secondary school level.
- 2) A survey study should be conducted to examine the factors that influence early school leaving. A survey study is recommended because the more the data which is available, the better the chances of identifying variables that can be good predictors of early school leaving and they may also help in determining possible solutions.
- 3) A comparative study should be conducted to understand how teachers and policy makers understand early school leaving in order to create awareness and to better understand the true meaning underlying early school leaving.
- 4) A study should be conducted to examine the effects of rules and regulations of the school on the attitudes and behaviours of the students. Some students had mentioned that the strict rules and regulations of the school encouraged them to rebel. Therefore, a study to determine the connection between the two variables would be helpful in understanding how rules and regulations affect student behaviour and attitude.
- 5) A study should be conducted to develop effective prevention programmes for early school leavers applicable to the Bhutanese context.

Recommendations to Keep Students in School

The growing rate of students leaving school early needs to be reduced through the combined efforts of home, school and community. According to Blum and Jones (1993) "it is critical to identify potential dropouts early, while they are in the elementary and intermediate school" (p. 207). Early intervention is a key to preventing school leaving, and a caring, nurturing, school environment is the most important aspect in keeping students in school. Therefore, preventing early school leaving calls

for the attention of administrators, teachers, schools and parents. The recommendations are grouped under the four areas accordingly.

Recommendations for Administrators

Administrators need to recognize that it is their responsibility to provide a school climate that is safe and secure for both teachers and students. One cannot underestimate the importance of a positive school environment in keeping at-risk students in school. To correct the problem of students leaving school early, educational professionals must devise more creative pedagogical methods and look for alternative scheduling patterns. School staff must be encouraged to refine and refresh their skills by conducting workshops for teachers on understanding students' behaviour. Institutions must be geared towards the development of a caring approach to instruction (i.e., clear and consistent support which focuses on student learning). Administrators need to understand that teachers feel a strong sense of obligation when they interact professionally and productively with colleagues, receive administrative support, maintain high standards for students, face clear administrative expectations, and have autonomy and discretion over day-to-day decisions. Therefore, staff development should be provided in an attempt to foster an understanding of students at risk, including the characteristics and identification of potential early leavers, and strategies to meet the needs of these students.

Administrators should introduce early school leaving prevention programmes which identify risk factors among students. The causes of the problem must be identified before possible solutions can be determined. School administrators must conduct workshops to invite teachers to participate in at-risk program activities by involving them in the planning and implementation of prevention efforts.

Administrators should provide parents with information on parenting skills, alternate methods of discipline, and improved communication skills. Such information for parents could also help them understand their children better and improve the parent-child relationship. Frequent teacher-parent conferences should be held which could be made compulsory for all the parents to attend because parent-school meetings not only enhance family-school relationships, but they also have an impact on student performance. Peeks (1993) believes that students learn at their fullest potential when the two most important influences in life, home and school, have a relationship based on cooperative interactions. Therefore, schools should invite parental participation as a partnership, rather than viewing their participation as just that of another group of persons needing education.

Administrators should provide smaller and more manageable classes in order to be able to provide individual attention to the students. Teachers with large classes do not have time to pay individualized attention to at-risk students. The class size demands attention in order to prevent students from leaving school.

School administrators should provide financial aid to those students who are casualties of poor economic backgrounds so that they also get the opportunity to go on to higher studies and do not feel pressure to leave school early.

Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers must work to understand the psychology of the students they are teaching. This implies recognizing the ways in which students seek acceptance and acknowledging the kinds of social and emotional problems they face. Teachers need to be supportive and project caring attitudes, which can take the form of simple civilities, like being pleasant, approachable, willing to talk, sensitive to mood shifts, and noticing students' appearances. Teachers need to increase contact with the students and their families because an increased awareness of family situations can assist staff members in recognizing early diagnosis of the students' problems. If teachers can recognize potentials dropouts, show them approval and love, provide educational experiences for them that they cannot get at home, ensure some degree of success in their work, and help them overcome their academic handicaps, they may actually prevent them from leaving school early.

Teachers should have high expectations of students, challenge the students to succeed, and provide opportunities for them to show initiative and take responsibility. Teachers should involve students in creating extra curricular activities and allow choices and autonomous decision making to empower them. It is also imperative to inform the authorities if any serious problems are detected in the students' personal lives.

Recommendations for School

Pratt (1994) is of the view that students attending school full-time for twelve years invest well over two thousand days of their youth in school; at six hours a day, that is twelve thousand hours. Students enter school as little more than infants and leave as young men and women. The school, for most of them, comes to shape their social lives, their self-concepts, their occupational futures. The entire age group is established into schools and the schools must attempt to accommodate all of them. Therefore, schools should develop a positive school climate for all students and staff by generating an attitude of caring .

Attention needs to be given to the need for caring throughout teachers' training. Pre-service teacher education needs to begin developing sensitivity in this regard. In-service and staff development must continue to deepen such sensitivity in the light of the actual day-to-day experience of practising teachers.

Counselling and other support systems like career guidance, mentoring and tutoring should be available to those students who need it. Such programmes would help promote the self-confidence and self-worth of all the students, but especially students with low self-esteem.

Schools should open up various avenues to encourage and develop students' talents and interests. Detecting and channelling various interests of students should be given a priority in order to make the school experience a thrilling and challenging one. Therefore, involving students in extracurricular activities and school projects would provide opportunities for positive interaction with peers and teachers.

Developing a defined discipline system with specific goals is a priority for productive schools. According to Benshoff, Poindevant and Cashwell (1994) "a systematic approach to discipline, then, can be viewed as one dimension of a total learning environment designed to impact on both cognitive and affective aspects of child development" (p. 164). Within schools, the discipline process has a great potential for affecting both positively and negatively, not only student behaviour, but also such critical areas as attitude, self-concept, and self-esteem. When children have difficulty coping with rules and regulations of the school, they should be helped to identify their behaviour and make value judgements about its appropriateness instead of punishing the child. Schools should develop personal relationships with their students, listen to them, and impart a feeling of self-worth and dignity. It is important that schools encourage children to learn that rules are important and that there are consequences for breaking rules. Teachers should be instructed to adhere to rules set forth and be consistent in applying them.

Recommendations for Parents

Parents should not leave the responsibility of guiding the children solely to the discretion of the school and the teachers. Parents should realize that their lack of supervision and interest in their children's activities would impair their abilities to detect changes in their children's normal behaviour patterns. Parents could coordinate closely with teachers to monitor the progress of their children and provide reinforcement at home. Parents should ensure that children receive wholesome education from the efforts of both school and home.

Parents can share important information with teachers about their children's interests and talents so that teachers could help students build on these strengths. Parents should become familiar with all aspects of their children's education. They should arrange meetings themselves, rather than wait to be summoned. Collaboration with teachers regarding schedules, assignments, classroom management, motivational techniques, and leadership opportunities, to name a few, should be commonly understood and paralleled or practised at home as well as in the classroom. Parents and teachers working together for a common goal, in a mutually respectful environment, should provide benefits for the children that have been unobtainable prior to such joint efforts.

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Centre for Educational Research and Development

Goals

- To support and undertake comprehensive and systematic curriculum development activities aimed at bringing about improvements in our education programmes;
- To foster a culture of enquiry and analysis in the continuous search of knowledge through regular interaction with research centres and institutes of repute;
- To study the current educational practices and developments in relevant fields and provide findings to the concerned agencies in education for consideration of policy options in relation to relevant educational goals, content, and methodology;
- Provide a forum for educators and researchers to support action-research and professional development for enhanced performance by our education stake-holders.
- Promote a national pool of scholarship and professionalism in the best traditions of research and development, for the flowering of the Bhutanese mind.

The major thrust areas of the Centre are research, publications and the professional support. To date, the Centre has developed a set of national standards for English for schools in Bhutan called *The Silken Knot*.

It has carried out a study on and made recommendations for the improvement of primary education and initiated modest programmes like the *Rinpung Experiment* and professional development activities, apart from participating in the *National Educational Assessment*, among others.

CERD has been working closely with CAPSD especially in the review and revision of the English curriculum – PP-XII, and supporting the Dzongkha Development Authority in the production of bilingual dictionaries.

The Centre has followed the evolution of our education system and published *The Call: Stories of Yesteryears*, and begun an educational journal called *Rabsel*. CERD has launched the publication of *Yontoen: the CERD Occasional Papers* recently.

Encouraging and initiating action research being one of its thrust areas, CERD invites contributions from our fellow-teachers, scholars, parents, students, and indeed, from anybody who has a stake in education, highlighting issues which have a bearing on the education of our children and the system as a whole.

Please send in your research papers, both hard and soft copies, to:

The Director
Centre for Educational Research and Development
NIE, Rinpung, Paro: BHUTAN

Or

email them to cerdir@druknet.bt
