

Child Rights and Ain no Salish Kendro

KHURSHEED ERFAN AHMED

Ain no Salish Kendro¹ (ASK) was formed in 1986 in Bangladesh to provide legal aid to the poor, women, working children, and workers. It evolved into a human rights center and aims to raise critical awareness of civic and legal rights.

ASK uses three interrelated strategies: action program, advocacy, and support services. Support services include legal aid, mobilization of the public, and field investigation of human rights violations.

Since its establishment, ASK has been well known for its human rights activism. ASK's Child Rights Unit (CRU) promotes quality education as a fundamental right for children. In Dhaka, CRU runs seven drop-in centers (DICs) for working children, who can use the DICs' health, education, and legal protection (HELP) facilities. The DICs are managed by 12 qualified and trained teachers.

Bangladesh

The population is largely young, with children comprising 40% of the total. Their education has been the subject of visionary statements such as Article 17 of the Constitution:

The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs.

Commissioned reports have reiterated this concern over the years:²

An education system is a weapon for implementation of a nation's hopes and aspirations and for building a new society. The main responsibility and goal of our education sys-

tem is to create an awareness among all sections of people about the requirements of life, to help develop an ability to solve various problems and to create an urge to establish a new socialistic society in consonance with the desires of the people.

xxx xxx xxx

The formation of a pupil's character and personality is of central importance in every educational scheme. Therefore the academic atmosphere, syllabuses and textbooks, methods of teaching and provision for sports and games at all levels of education must be such as to encourage the favourable development of a pupil's character and personality. The pupils must be made to realise the importance of and follow truthfulness, honesty, fair play, impartiality, orderly conduct, duty and disinterested work for the country's welfare.

As early as the 19th century, an enquiry into educational development in India led to the Education Dispatch of 1854 by Charles Wood.³ An extract reflects the views of the foreign rulers:

Among many subjects of importance, none can have a stronger claim to our attention than that of education. It is one of our most sacred duties to be the means, as far as in us lies, of conferring upon the natives of India, those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge, and which India may, under

Providence, desire from her connection with the English.

Commissioned reports in recent years also emphasize the need to reset education priorities. The Mofizuddin Ahmed Education Commission Report of 1988 includes, among other ideals, the eradication of illiteracy, conversion of human resources into a national asset, raising the standard of living, increasing religious awareness, inspiring original thinking, and arousing people's love for country and respect for its freedom and sovereignty.

The task force set up in 1993 by the Bangladesh Planning Commission was perhaps the first to recommend a strong review of the quality of education. The task force also recommended giving greater importance to teaching-learning materials and proper training of teachers:

There are inadequacies in the existing teacher training outfits: these need to be reviewed immediately to determine appropriate training packages with due consideration to various skills, making primary teachers institutes (PTIs) and National Academy of Primary Education (NAPE) professionally competent organisations xxx The teaching aids should be modernised. An interfacing between government teacher training programmes and NGOs teacher training and orientation courses could be helpful in developing a more capable system suited to our needs.

Education is acquired formally and non-formally. The family and community may be considered the first step in nonformal education, since they shape the child's personality. Traditional knowledge in artisan skills, dance and music, farming systems, and health care are learned with the family, caste, and community. A paternalistic relationship exists between the teacher and pupil, and learning is practical (subscribing to the cultural ethos of excellence in production). Disciplined respect exists between the knowledge giver and recipi-

ent. Educators with unquestionable subject competency earned the title of "guru," "maestro," or "wise elder." The traditional communication from gurus to disciples produced skilled artisans and experts, who also learned socially accepted behavior. Numerous religious institutes such as *toll* (traditional Hindu schools), Christian convents, and *madrassa* (Islamic schools) mold children's personality and once provided most people with nonformal basic education.

The colonial government introduced formal education to meet the need for administrative and management expertise. The formal education system, with its prescribed syllabi and certified examinations, radically changed informal, traditional education. Given a group of dedicated teachers, a manageable teacher-student ratio, and an effective supervisory system, the primary schools produced literate and well-informed graduates despite the teacher- and lecture-dominated classes. Over the decades, this system has succumbed to a host of limitations such as crowded classes and untrained and insufficient teachers, inevitably resulting in rote learning that does little to develop children's potential.

After liberation in 1971, the government adopted incremental strategies to provide universal access to primary schooling. All 36,165 primary schools were nationalized in 1973. A program to universalize primary education was launched in 1981. The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act was passed in 1990. Now there are 66,944 primary education institutes, including 37,710 government primary schools and other education centers such as kindergartens, and nongovernmental organization (NGO), community, and unregistered schools. Under the General Education Program, 200 satellite schools near children's homes were established. Schools now have food incentives, more female teachers, and better infrastructure. These efforts resulted in the enrollment of 18.5 million children of primary-school age. The completion rate is reported at 61%. Still, many

people are apprehensive that poor-quality education does not promote children's emotional, affective, and cognitive development, and that outmoded methods of learning hinder the ability of children to achieve their potential.

The national preoccupation with quantitative goals in primary schooling has probably meant the neglect of the qualitative aspects, which are equally important for higher completion rates. We have noted that high-quality nonformal NGO centers with relevant curriculums and effective teaching methods have low dropout rates. Planners should thus promote an atmosphere conducive to learning by providing a liberal and relevant curriculum, training for teachers in facilitation, education of teachers in subject competency, a manageable teacher-student ratio, and appropriate learning materials and teaching techniques.

Today we are grappling with learning techniques or alternate ways of providing high-quality education, which have been the subject of pedagogic research in developed countries since the 17th century, when a revolution in primary education introduced learner-centered processes.

Theories of Child-Centered Learning

A glimpse into the education theories of the European Enlightenment will show that successful education systems need nurturing with support from the state and the general public. Continuous research on different education methods and its dissemination among discerning educators is needed to do away with unsuccessful learning strategies. It was in the liberal atmosphere of the Enlightenment and with such incentives that the developed countries produced famous pioneers in the field of child education.

In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French educationist, published *Emile*, which contained the beginnings of the theory of child-centered learning. He wrote that children's capacity to learn goes through stages of development and

that bookish knowledge and rote learning of abstract concepts such as religion or morals should be prohibited for pre-adolescents. He recommended physical activities, outdoor games, and songs as learning supports. He believed, like most child-centered educationists, in innate human goodness, rejecting moral commandments and punishments.

Jean Piaget, the modern Swiss educationist, followed his example, re-emphasizing children's levels of development. Piaget believed that most children would begin to understand abstractions only in adolescence. Today, learner-centered education has advanced sufficiently in developed countries to have produced a sizable body of books and films for different stages of childhood. Rousseau lived in an era when books were published only for adults.

Friedrich Froebel, the 19th-century German education reformer, introduced the idea of kindergarten or pre-primary learning. He recommended the use of suitable toys and games to aid early childhood development. He likened teachers to gardeners, who nurtured their "plants" to grow freely, rather than to potters, who shape plants as they wish. He was against the extreme behaviorist theorists who believed that circumstances and situations could condition human development, that teachers or educators could mold students in a "desirable" way. Froebel believed in people's natural goodness and that antisocial and delinquent behavior resulted from the thwarting by adults of children's inherent good impulses. He cites the example of children wanting to help their parents work and how parents reject their unskillful attempts as "selfish."

Maria Montessori, a name familiar to most educators in Bangladesh, worked with children in slums and pioneered the famous Montessori method for early childhood development. For the first time, educational resources and materials gained importance in encouraging independent learning and spontaneous discovery of facts without the teachers' domineering guidance. Letters mounted on cardboard and

other materials were devised to help children discover words or learn activities.

The Dalton Plan, which originated in Dalton, Massachusetts, the United States, introduced the concept of independent study on a “project task” assigned to or selected by learners, to be completed within a certain time. This method underlines a belief that enthusiasm for learning is natural. The Dalton Plan would be suitable for NGO target learners who are concerned with their living conditions and interested in surveying and analyzing problems. The Dalton Plan is a learning process that gives children a mechanism for understanding their world, with freedom to choose their ways of study. The project task is now commonly used in primary schools in developed countries to encourage independent thought.

When I was learning about English primary schooling in London in 1987, I observed groups of children 12 to 13 years old absorbed in studying life in the Victorian era. This meant, as one girl told me, “visiting museums, collecting appropriate bibliography, and maybe interviewing people for the final report.” She was particularly engrossed in the Victorian concept of gender.

I was very impressed although I knew the task was probably assigned by the teacher. Yet, I thought, how many university students in Bangladesh would apply their analytical skills to such scholarly pursuits?

We should also remember, however, that some child-centered theories take extreme forms. Some have controversial views on how to teach religion, sex education, or child rights. Some of us may not want to teach these subjects to adolescents. Others, depending on their ideology, may decide to teach them by using a child-centered method or by morally indoctrinating children. None of the subjects is in the government curriculum although some NGOs teach reproductive health and child rights. Should religion be taught as tenets of divine commands or should children also be encouraged to study all religions as a source of social

change and inspiration to good conduct with tolerance in different beliefs? Most child-centered educationists, although religious themselves, believe that religious concepts cannot be absorbed before adolescence.

With the increase in AIDS other sexual diseases, sexual violence, reproductive health, sexuality, and gender are now considered important topics in schools. Gender equality and respect for the opposite sex need to be ingrained at an early age, especially by children who have to face the hazards of street life.

A discussion of child rights might further distress children who do not enjoy those rights. Education on child rights may also alarm the parents and guardians who have so far not had their authority questioned. However, leaving children uninformed about their rights is the same as depriving them of these rights. A good facilitator and/or educator knows how to strike a balance between imparting information and resolving the child’s reaction to a new sense of empowerment.

Compulsory education, although a recommended national policy in developing countries, is questioned by some child-centered educationists, mainly in highly developed societies where literacy and education standards are high, who believe that attractive and relevant learning should need no compulsion. In less developed societies, however, parents need to be compelled to send their children to school instead of work.

In the 1970s Ivan Illich wrote *De-Schooling Society*, which blasts the formal school system’s examination horror, boredom of routine attendance, and irrelevant curriculum. He suggested “learning webs” or an arrangement for skills and intellectual learning provided by experts to those who wish to learn.

Philip Aries in *Centuries of Childhood* argues that by segregating children in schools, adults were protecting them from real-life experiences. Development stages of childhood, as distinct from adulthood, he says, subtly subjugate the younger generation.

Child-centered educators may also differ with conventional teachers over designing curriculum. Should it be designed to fit a child in a given social order or should it be designed as a strategy to instill in children a spirit to change a given social order? Should training in music, dance, sports, and vocation be an integral part of a child's development? Such questions can only be answered if educationists and students have the freedom to discuss them.

Although these theories may be extreme, educators can use them to balance freedom and growth of personality.

Different child-centered initiatives strengthened the early pioneerism in different ways. Most were participatory methods applied in modern schools in developed countries. How children-centered they were is uncertain. Even developed countries expect a system, through trial and error, to combine child-centered and teacher-guided learning.

Child-centered learning theories will significantly influence curriculum and textbook content. As children tend to believe what they read, educationists caution against using materials that could promote racism, sexism, or religious intolerance, especially in a world of violence. The curriculum should leave the child's mind open, enquiring, and sensitized, and not closed and dogmatic.

Learner-Centered Methods

Learner-centered methods of education are based on the belief that people have the innate ability to learn at different levels. The experiential context of a person is the starting point, which teaching materials can stimulate to elicit the desire to discover and learn. In communicative participation, the learner is helped to discuss the subject free from teacher indoctrination or social dogmas.

In the participatory approach, communication is not one-way, but three-way among the teacher, learners, and teaching materials. Vi-

suals, role play, or group exercise are indispensable to the educator who need not dominate the class with monologues, lectures, and dictation. Children need not learn by rote. The interaction will allow prediction of objective outputs.

The process of participatory communicative learning requires the following:

- a teacher trained to facilitate and competent in the subject;
- methods that encourage children to learn independently; and
- teaching materials, aids, and techniques that stimulate participatory learning.

Successful child-centered learning needs trained teachers, who may find the tips for facilitators below useful (see table).

It is heartening to note that the government has set up the Directorate for Nonformal Education to expand literacy. However, while developed countries provide resource centers and bibliography for potential facilitators, educators in Bangladesh are not greatly exposed to contemporary modular forms of learning. Anyone who wishes to learn about child-centered ways of education through literature or publications might find this an impossible task. This is a major reason for presenting *My World* to educators.

My World

My World is a manual for teachers. It consists of text, modules, and materials on general education for adolescents, and shares child-centered learning experiences with educators. The first edition was presented in 1998 to educationists at primary teachers institutes (PTIs) and teacher training colleges, whose demand for the book resulted in the printing of 5,000 copies of the second edition in 2000. Both editions were sponsored by Save the Children (USA). Feedback was solicited from teachers' forums in Dhaka and from the frontline workers in primary education.

Tips for Facilitators

Evaluation helps improve our own and the children's performance. An evaluation format is annexed, but facilitators and educators should draw up their own evaluation formats for each session or for the whole unit. Children's views and responses should be an important part of the formats.

Learner-centered education is a progressive approach in which the "teacher" is a guide or facilitator, and the pupil plays the active role.

Intrinsic motivation, inner discipline, and independent deductions replace conventional standards of achievement such as examinations, competition, and classroom scores.

Fully or mixed child-centered methods are used in most developed countries and in some developing countries. The methods can be applied to literacy learning, survival skills, and human rights awareness. Facilitators' techniques range from role play, music, group exercise, and brainstorming, to the use of audiovisual aids, among other methods.

In the last decade or so, nonformal teaching has been institutionalized by some reputable NGOs such as Gono Shahajo Shangshtha and Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) through short-term teacher training.

Facilitators should

- become competent in the subject by reading up on each topic;
- design lesson plans for each session of the unit;
- structure lesson plans for pre-learning and prepare reinforcement sessions;
- prepare warm-up games and introductory openings for each unit session;
- prepare songs, entertaining quizzes, and games to keep the children's attention;
- be sensitive to children's attention span and any sign of fatigue;
- prepare materials for different techniques;
- listen carefully to the children and avoid interrupting them;
- learn to evaluate their own performance and the realization of workshop objectives;
- avoid meting out punishment or threatening to give examinations;
- make workshops a joyful experience of interactive learning; and
- take suggestions for new topics from the children.

What began as small scale and low key is now a national effort to help educators learn child-centered teaching methods.

The objectives of this publication are as follows:

- Project innovative and contemporary ways of teaching adolescents in nonformal and formal schools.
- Provide modular structures with illustrated teaching material to guide educators.
- Inform educators about successful participatory approaches that encourage independent learning rather than learning by rote.
- Share ASK's education expertise with other organizations, professionals, and interested individuals.

My World has evolved from a series of workshops into a 12-unit syllabus on humanities, facilitated by trained educators of working children at the DICs. The manual is used for a

year, one module per month. The modules are the following:

- Unit 01. My Self
- Unit 02. My Body
- Unit 03. My Health
- Unit 04. My Food
- Unit 05. My Environment
- Unit 06. My Country
- Unit 07. My Neighbors
- Unit 08. My History
- Unit 09. My Culture
- Unit 10. My Beliefs
- Unit 11. My Reproductive Health and Gender
- Unit 12. My Rights

ASK compiled a case study on working children⁴ and found that one of their immediate demands was flexible education, which could be provided at the DICs, thereby allowing children to study and work. Thus, ASK made them a three-phased plan: basic, continuing, and general.

Basic education consists of skills in literacy and numeracy. The educators are trained by Gono Shahajo Shangshhta (GSS), which adapts modern learning theories and techniques. ASK makes school hours flexible. The DIC literacy learning centers, also known as *jokhon tokhon* (anytime) schools, have libraries, show films, and hold workshops on general subjects of interest.

Continued education is provided to educators and children. Children have access to libraries; play learning games; and take music, art, and drama classes. Every week, eminent educators and subject specialists share their knowledge with ASK educators, who also take refresher training in module design and material development.

General education is an important subject at ASK's CRU. The 12-topic syllabus assumes that all children have a right to knowledge and survival skills. Workshops can be held in any nonformal setting, although some of the methods are flexible enough for formal settings, as well. The recommended facilitator-learner ratio is 1:25 at most. When classrooms are crowded, team teachers can help out. The teaching area should be spacious for group exercises, and fixtures light and mobile. ASK workshops are held mostly on carpeted floors or under trees in good weather.

A child need not be literate to join the workshops. Even the nonliterate can grasp the *My World* modules, for example.

My World Workshops

Facilitators are trained to adapt their techniques to the children's response. Each workshop session is run by two facilitators and completed within an hour and a half. Intervals are recommended between sessions for warm-up games or songs (see annex).

Four to six sessions complete each unit of the monthly workshop series. Sessions can be lengthened or shortened depending on the

learners' level of understanding. Assignments (project tasks) are given on the topic discussed.

Materials should be made by facilitators and educators at the planning phase. One set, laminated, can serve all classes. At each workshop, children are given a "My World Diary" for creative work and for keeping notes on the various topics. Pages are titled by topic. The diaries can also be used for a "project task" as a follow-up on each unit topic. For example, if the children wish to pursue "My Environment," they can survey their community and study how to remove pollution or recycle waste. The educators can draw up a project task on the immediate needs of improving the environment.

Most lesson plans are structured into *pre-learning*, *learning*, and *learning reinforcements*.

Prelearning introduces the topic, warms up the atmosphere, and prepares children for the unit. Stories, songs, and games are attractive starters.

Learning is the main phase of the lesson. Creative materials and group exercise facilitate the learning objective.

Learning reinforcement is the informal test on topics learned through group exercise or games. Illustrated exercises, and games are explained in the annex.

Each phase is divided into sessions that encourage active and independent learning. Strategies consist of different techniques, but they should be predictable.

Teaching materials, aids, and techniques include text, curriculum, games, or hand-outs. Techniques include games, role play, questions and answers, problem solving, group exercises, etc. Learning aids are equipment such as writing boards, flip charts, audio cassettes, televisions, videos, slides, etc. In a way the facilitator or the educator is the most important learning aid. Educators are advised to use locally available low-cost teaching aids.

A few units do not have the three-phase learning steps but contain various sessions that

can be turned into steps to allow educators to be more creative.

My World can be used by educators of adolescents in nonformal centers or in upper-primary schools. The educators should have at least an undergraduate or graduate degree and the enthusiasm to improve their competency. Each unit in the book encourages further reading.

***My World* Syllabus**

ASK has used workshops since 1990. In its earlier days, the process was primarily for recreation, some learning, and building children's sense of well-being. In time, ASK learned to use workshops for general education as facilitators interacted more with children.

In preparing a teachers' guide, we retested activity sessions of the units on about 20 children (40% girls), 11 to 15 years old, who would be able to attend workshops regularly, had permission from their guardians or employers, and were in reasonably good health.

Facilitators' notes in the unit modules contain instructions on using methods and materials for learning and recreation. The workshops' targets were working children, and the process was adapted to meet their special needs. However, the same topics and structure can also target children of a different background. Although aimed at child-centered learning, most workshops were conducted with freedom for children and with guidance from tutors.

Authors, facilitators, reviewers, and the children were consulted about the tested workshops. Evaluation formats were developed for facilitators to evaluate their own performance and the children's response. A group of educationists reviewed the manuscript and recommended amendments that were useful for the final publication.

All units orient the facilitators on the topic. They are advised to go through the reading references and to collect as much information as possible. The frequency and timing of ses-

sions are flexible. Group exercises and techniques were field-tested by ASK personnel.

Education Feedback Forum

In the developed world, education is always under scrutiny by the learners and the learned. Wisdom requires that critical appreciation be applied to our ways of learning and its impact on the community that we profess to transform. ASK, in cooperation with the Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research (IER), held the Education Feedback Forum on 28 November 2001 in Dhaka.

The forum was attended by 80 distinguished participants, including eminent educationists and teachers from nonformal and formal schools. ASK's 18th forum, it was the first that lobbied for quality education in cooperation with IER, an appropriately prestigious institution.

CRU uses the jokhon tokhon schools to help young workers discover education, and after 10 years this approach is showing results.

The forum focused on the following:

- evaluation of the second edition of *My World*, for teachers, by Khursheed Erfan Ahmed, director of CRU, with ASK educators; translated by the late Nazeem Mahmood; and edited by Raushan Jahan (vice president of Mohila Porishad, and president of Women for Women), and Naushaba Khaton (retired teacher, IER; and an eminent educationist);
- demonstration of selected units by CRU facilitators Nargis Akther and Rashida Khanom; and
- projection of educationists' views on quality teacher performance and training, and the benefits of using the method and materials suggested in *My World*.

As Kamrunessa Begum said, IER was established in 1959 through the joint efforts of Dhaka University, the government, and USAID. USAID contracted Colorado State College (later University of Northern Colorado) to

establish, organize, and direct the initial stages of IER. Classes began on 1 July 1960 with 33 students. Students could earn a degree in education, or a bachelor and/or masters degree in education in two shifts. School teachers can also take short-term courses in curriculum design. Today IER has 700 students.

Professor Begum said that a good teacher should have three qualities:

- subject competency and desire to learn;
- knowledge about the learners, their interest, background, and intelligence level; and
- knowledge and skills in teaching methods.

Professor Khatoon said that the author's professionalism added credibility to *My World* and that the use of inexpensive audiovisuals was commendable, especially in a poor country where some NGOs rush to acquire expensive and inappropriate electronic training media.

Md. Ibrahim, director of the Center for Mass Education and Science (CMES), said that his organization's main program is nonformal scientific, technical, and functional education for drop-out adolescents, who, he feared, left school bored by uninteresting teaching and irrelevant subjects. He noted approvingly that in Switzerland, 60% of the students after grade 8 are sent to learn functional skills in factories. CMES's skill-based teaching is divided into class academics and out-of-class practical teaching. CMES needs to publish its methodology, as well. However, he was glad to say that the 600 copies of *My World* taken from ASK were appropriate for the objectives of CMES. He felt the use of "My" was significant in developing a sense of ownership in children, a practice adopted by CMES in most creative writings by children.

Md. Ibrahim also elaborated on CMES's Adolescent Girls program, which deals with reproductive health. This topic is compact and clear in *My World*. Such expertise in nonformal education, he said, should be mainstreamed into the formal education system. He said it

was probably the only manual on pedagogic research in Bangladesh illustrating child-centered methods for education. He emphasized the need for respect for manual work and encouraged teachers to establish the linkage between developing mental and manual capacities among children.

Ahmed—explained the 10-year process of pedagogic research and consultative process that went into producing the two editions of *My World*. She explained that the seven DICs served as an entry point for receiving complaints about child rights violations and legal problems of their community. At the same time the DICs offer working children access to health care and recreational education. She went on to explain the modules of *My World*.

Demonstration of Units

Nargis Akther (senior facilitator) and Rashida Khanom (facilitator) of CRU demonstrated selected sessions from units on reproductive health, child rights, and infant feeding, which, they said, rural teachers request most often. The facilitators used paper dolls, posters, group exercise, and board work.

Some of the learners' responses to *My World* were presented on a flip chart.

The facilitators said the response of the adolescents shows that, despite a harsh childhood, they have excellent potential for independent thinking.

Participants' Feedback

Educators from different organizations presented their own concerns as well as their views on *My World*. Teachers were unfamiliar with such forums and pedagogic research. The presentation of the Bangla translation (its dots and dashes) in *My World* was of concern to some teachers. Some teachers recommended more topics. Educationists felt that mainstreaming modular efforts in primary schools was an urgent need.

Flip Chart

My Country	: Wish I were a freedom fighter !
On Neighboring Countries	: Sri Lanka is like a teardrop from the sky : Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are one country. Its been cut into three. Bangladesh is very small on the map. How can we make ourselves powerful?
On Myself	: My greatest need is a loving mother.
On My Nutrition	: Rich people take rich food so they cannot work hard. We eat simple but nutritious food and therefore we are hard-working.
On My Health (Infant feeding)	: Infants are left in grandmothers' care because parents work. Grandmothers bottle-feed the infants.
On My Belief	: We don't like to go into temples and look at <i>Murties</i> (religious statues), but we enjoy <i>holli</i> (a Hindu festival). We like Christian and Hindu music. : I fear Allah. I will go to hell if I do not pray or fast.
On My Rights	: We are all adults at eight years old. We must work to support ourselves and our family. How can I demand my rights?
Reproductive Health and Gender	: Women do the most important work as mothers and in saving our lives. : Now we know that chromosomes of males contribute to the sex of a baby !
My History	: At the museum of history at the Shishu Academy we saw historical events but no women in the visuals. Why? Are there no women leaders in our history? : Adults use weapons to kill. Children and women don't use weapons.
My Body	: My eyes and feelings are most important to me because I feel what I see, then I learn. : As I grow into girlhood, boys and men look at us differently. Parents scold us. Employers are to be feared.
In General	: We love workshops better than classes. We wish all schools had workshop teaching. : The project tasks facilitators give us after the workshop help us to teach our community. We are proud to become leaders of our people. : We know more about street life than our facilitators. : <i>Mastan</i> (cargo workers) are good and bad. : We also know who is involved in illegal activity in the <i>bastee</i> (slums). : We learning easily. We feel that it's valuable to know <i>My World</i> .

Some responses from participants follow:

- A teacher from IER (Mariam Begum) said that a few Bengali words were incorrect, not colloquial, and difficult.
 - Instructional language could be used in the module.
 - Other topics such as safe sex, protection against sexual abuse, occupational diseases, etc., should be included.
 - Group work as suggested in *My World* may be better than involving the whole class in a single activity.
 - Our methods can be improved with regular feedback.
- Errors in the first edition on body cells and chromosomes were noted, and corrections in the second edition pointed out by facilitators from IER.
 - Mirza Md. Shah Jamal from BRAC said that “My Profession” should be added to the book, and children should be made aware of dowry, trafficking, and juvenile delinquency. Short- and long-term research and impact assessment studies can be conducted to do so.
 - Chowdhury Md. Mohayemen from Aparajieo Bangladesh said that “first-aid methods,” an in-depth description of child

psychology, and information on HIV/AIDS should be included in the health unit.

- An Underprivileged Children Education Programme (UCEP) teacher said that boys and girls should be grouped together and not segregated for discussions on reproductive health.
- Md. Sazedur Rahman of UCEP said that the subjects are difficult for children. UCEP gives them more time and observes them for three to six months. ASK could do the same.
- Sajeda Begum Munni of Aparajieo Bangladesh said that working children are assumed to know the local mastan.
- Janet Clarke, education adviser of Programme to Motivate, Train and Employ Female Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools (PROMOTE), praised the educators who demonstrated the units for their excellent communication skills and effective techniques, which simplified complex subjects for children.
- Teachers should have more time to discuss learning problems.

In response to the forum, the author of *My World* said that the intensity of appreciative criticism shows that educators need forums to exchange ideas at least once or twice a year. Leaders and policymakers have outlined their visions on national education plans. Several conferences have been conducted and task forces formed to resolve the schools' problems and improve their infrastructure. However, little or no effort has been made to involve the teachers in updating education methods as in developed countries or even in the nonformal sector.

Opportunities are rare for discourse on method and pedagogy. The exclusive focus of the education feedback forum was thus a positive step. The demonstration of the use of *My World* encouraged teachers to discuss modules, lesson plan methods, materials, the need for training, and its impact on learners.

Quality education as professed in the West needs to be spread widely in the mainstream to enrich teacher training colleges and PTIs through professional discourse, publications, and in-service demonstration.

At the forum it was demonstrated that education can be based on experience, for the mind is not a *tabula rasa*. ASK's workshop strategy was to enlighten the working adolescent, youth in general, and nonliterate parents. Groups with different experiences did not need pens, pencils, or books to discover their world. The workshop media for general education were equally applicable for the literate and nonliterate. Information, education, and communication are eagerly absorbed if the facilitator can sustain the learners' interest. The rights to information and education are fundamental and cannot be denied to the nonliterate. The educator facilitator needs to have subject competency, the appropriate body language, and cognitive and social transformation skills.

Closing Session

Feedback on education for teachers is an outlet for discussing countless personal and professional problems such as infrastructure, status, salary, security, etc. The educators were motivated to express their views on the method and content of education. Although the focus was on *My World*, the forum led participants to see a need for wider pedagogic research to prepare teachers to inspire independent and critical thinking among learners.

In developed countries, resource centers are attached to clusters of schools where methods can be tested and where training in practical skills is an essential part of teacher education. Many books are published on methods in most of these countries. Audiovisual media can also be purchased as training material. She noted that teachers' forums have always been successful as they give a sense of the level of the comprehension of the educators and of the children they work with.

The forum closed at Iftar⁵ but the teacher-participants' enthusiasm showed that the discussion could have gone on for hours after.

Conclusion

The school's long stream of tide and tediousness.

Winds slowly on through torpor through dismay.

O loneliness, O time that creeps away.

In the early 19th century, Rainer Maria Rilke reflected on the state of childhood in Germany,⁶ but he could have been writing about the boredom and futility of compulsory primary education in Bangladesh today.

In our haste for incremental values in education, such as more schools, greater enrollment, high test scores, etc., we have lost sight of the qualitative and human effects of good education. The didactic approach to learning may produce a herd of unthinking citizens.

ASK reiterates the need for well-informed educators and the development of quality education as a requisite of child rights in a democratic state. Education as a process of awareness and social transformation is the fundamental aspect of activism, its foundation best laid in the child's formative years. With a humane

approach to learning, we may reach a world where equity, justice, and compassion reign.

Our work needs recognition and evaluation from the educators and teachers who are our frontline leaders at the grass-roots level. Teachers are on the lowest rung of the social ladder. They have little or no training in self development, and few role models to encourage in them the passion of enlightenment and participatory discourse. However, if recruitment is done properly and a cadre of faculty adequately trained, the pedagogy of primary education in Bangladesh will likely emerge from its neglect.

Notes

1. Ain no Salish Kendro (ASK) literally means Law and Mediation Centre.

2. Excerpts from the Quadrat-E-Khuda Education Commission Report of 1974.

3. See A.K. Jalaluddin and A. M.R. Chowdhury, *Getting Started*, University Press Limited (Dhaka: 1997).

4. Khurshed Ahmed, *Where Children are Adults*, Ain no Salish Kendro (Dhaka: Ain no Salish Kendro, 1990).

5. This is when Muslims eat their first meal during Ramadan, after sunset between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m.

6. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Selected Poems—Childhood," in *Images* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960). Translated into English by J.B. Leishman, Penguin Books (London: Penguin Books, 1964 and 2000), p. 24.

APPENDIX A

This is one full module taken from *My World*.*

UNIT 12 MODULE

- Topic : My rights
 Participants : 16 to 20 children
 Materials : Flash cards, posters, picture cards
 Duration: : Six days. Six sessions. Each session within two hours.
 Objective : To acquaint children with the notion of child rights.

Facilitator's notes

Child rights are a sensitive subject for children who have been deprived of their rights and who have no support for demanding them. This makes it difficult for the facilitator to choose appropriate learning strategies to avoid negative reactions from the children.

The facilitator needs to know the children and their situation very well before starting this unit. It is presumed that the facilitator will have conducted all the rest of the units of *My World* with the same children.

The sessions below present methods to elicit the children's needs and wants and to connect the learning process to child rights as related to concepts of survival, protection, development, and participation in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Learning material includes visuals, group tasks, and other creative and active methods.

DAY ONE: SESSION ONE

Objective: Discourse about adults and children

Pre-learning

The workshops start with warm-up games, group singing, or a story.

Learning

Adults and children

The facilitator shows a poster of children and adults as a family to lead the discussion to children's and adult's perception of childhood. The children express their views and the facilitators listen carefully to them.

Pair exercise

The facilitator divides children into pairs and gives them enough time to talk with each other and to list things that children may not

do and why not. While the children prepare, the facilitator draws columns on the board under the following categories:

- What children may not do
- Why children may not do these things

The facilitator arranges the responses logically so that children can understand why they cannot or may not do certain things. For example:

A child cannot marry	because s/he is not fully developed to take on responsibilities.
A child cannot go to war	because s/he is too small and cannot defend him/herself.
A child cannot cook	because s/he might burn her/himself.
A child cannot be left alone	because it is not safe.
A child cannot take care of adults	because a child needs to be taken cared of.

Figure 12.1

The facilitator discusses the topic further to highlight the differences between the capacities of children and adults. Considering that the children do many things that adults do, the list must come from the children first, guided by the facilitator.

In a similar way, the facilitator does a pair exercise to elicit from the children what they think adults should do and why. Thus, the facilitator leads the discussion to adults' responsibility to care for and protect children.

Learning Reinforcement

Using the "My Rights" diary

After the discussion, the facilitator distributes "My Rights" diaries to children and asks them to draw an adult and a child on the first page, showing their physical differences.

Those who can write may note down the roles they feel children and adults are expected to perform. The facilitator helps those who cannot write. Then the diaries are displayed and the children allowed to discuss and explain what they have drawn or written. The facilitator does not correct them.

* Khurshedd Erfan Ahmed, *My World*, Ain no Salish Kendro (Dhaka: 2000).

How long can I be a child?

Children are helped to recall the discussion on children's roles. The facilitator asks them how long they think a child is limited to doing only certain things or how long a person remains a child.

The facilitator draws two columns on the board: the left column listing numbers 1 to 16; the right, titled "Adulthood." The numbers denote ages in years. The children raise their hands when facilitator calls out a number if they feel it is an adult age. The facilitator writes down the number of hands raised. The survey results vary with different target groups of children. With working children the survey result might read as follows:

No. of years	Adulthood
1	No hands
2	"
3	"
4	"
5	"
6	"
7	"
8	"
9	4 hands
10	8 hands
11	10 hands
12	13 hands
13	20 hands
14	20 hands
15	20 hands
16	20 hands

Figure 12.2

The facilitator asks children their views on the chronology of childhood and on their parents and society and how they perceive childhood. The children's opinions are listed on the board. The facilitator leads an open discussion on how the children see themselves and how they would like to be perceived—as children or adults.

The session ends with a song or game.

DAY TWO: SESSION TWO**Objective: Orientation on needs and wants****Pre-learning**

The session starts with songs, games, or storytelling, depending on what the children want to do. Earlier sessions are reviewed. The children paste pictures, draw, or write in their diaries. Facilitators encourage children's creativity.

While Learning*Eliciting needs*

The facilitator recalls the need and wants elicited from the children in unit 01. The facilitator puts up the poster with all the cards filled in by the children. The children are asked to discuss each need and bring up more if they want to.

Categorizing needs

The facilitator divides the board into two sections. On the left side are the listed needs. On the right side are four squares labeled "Survival," "Protection," "Development," and "Participation." Thus, the categorization on the board will read as follows:

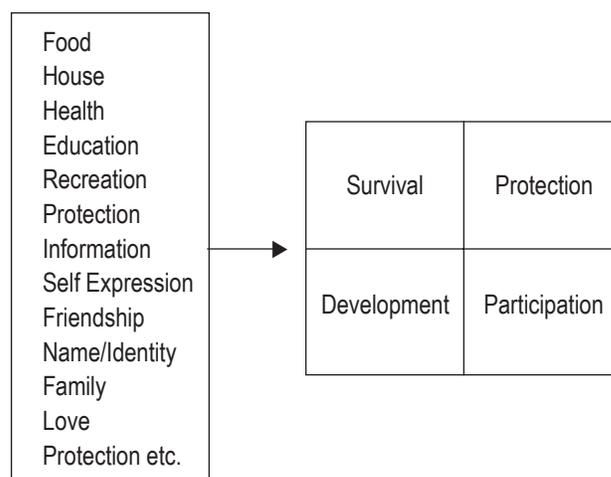


Figure 12.3

The facilitator makes provisions on the board (or flip chart) to categorize various needs under survival, development, protection, and participation, and explains that it is important to satisfy human needs for a secure and happy life. These categories are discussed with the help of the listed needs.

In a question-answer drill, the facilitator elicits from the children their various needs and how they think they should be clustered.

Learning Reinforcement

The facilitator prepares 15 to 20 flash cards with the listed needs and wants written on them and divides the children into two groups, who choose the flash cards that have their needs and wants.

The facilitator asks the children to discuss among themselves the nature of these needs and wants and their category, then to place the flash cards in the appropriate cluster or category.

DAY THREE: SESSION THREE**Objective: Information on country laws****Pre-learning**

The session begins with a warm-up song, game, or story. The ground rules of workshops agreed upon by all the children are reviewed. The facilitator informs the children that every country has rules and regulations, and that it is the states' responsibility to meet people's needs and see that justice is done.

The facilitator tells the children that they will learn the rules relating to their welfare and protection.

While Learning*Country laws*

In simple language the facilitator explains to the children the meaning of the Constitution. Comparing it to the ground rules children made on the first day of the workshop, the facilitator tells them that rules for citizens' behavior are made by representatives of a sovereign country and that these codified rules are called the constitution. The facilitator also explains that laws are passed to enforce these rules and that it is the government's duty to see that rules are not broken and that justice prevails.

The facilitator explains with flash cards examples of laws:

Marriageable age: 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys.

Primary education: Schooling is compulsory for all children from the age of five. The state must provide school facilities.

Cruelty against children: Many laws protect children against violence, exploitation, deprivation, and abuse.

Child labor: Laws protect children from engaging in hazardous work.

Age of majority: Children become adults at 18. Until then, their activities are restricted and certain laws do not apply to them:

- Children cannot be used for hard work.
- Children cannot go to war.
- Children cannot be imprisoned.
- Children must go to school.
- Children need protection, and all facilities for survival and development.

The facilitator tells the children that their guardians, and not they, will be held responsible for violating these laws. The children are encouraged to discuss the laws in a way that doesn't hurt their self-esteem. We must remember that the children may also be working children, who consider themselves as good as adults!

Learning Reinforcement

The facilitator conducts a question-answer drill to help the children review and revise what they have learned. The facilitator may also design a question-answer game to reinforce what they have learned.

DAY FOUR: SESSION FOUR**Objective: To conduct a dialogue on children's needs, wants, and rights****Pre-learning**

The session starts with a warm-up game and song.

While Learning

The children are divided into two groups. The facilitator explains to the children that the two groups will engage in a debate. The children are asked to elect three judges, including the facilitator and two members, one from each of the two groups. The facilitator stresses that the selected judges are to be absolutely fair.

Flash cards contain topics of debate. After tossing a coin or a similar gimmick, the winning group picks a card. If it turns out to be a television, the group's representative, with the help of the group, argues in favor of the need for a television as a "right." The opposing group argues against it.

This is an important exercise for understanding needs, wants, and rights through dialogue. For example, a child may want ice cream everyday, but is that a right?

Learning Reinforcement

The dialogue in the previous session provides an activity for learning and learning reinforcement. The children play games and sing songs about child rights, and do creative work in their diaries.

DAY FIVE: SESSION FIVE**Objective: Orientation on the CRC****Pre-learning**

The session starts with games and music.

While Learning

Do we have the rights?

The facilitator seats the children in a circle, asks them what they think rights are and whether they have rights, and helps them recall the exercise on needs and laws. The facilitator then tells the children about the CRC and the United Nations.

The facilitator helps the children review the session on "Our Neighbors" and SAARC countries and explains the need for nations to unite for the welfare of the children of the world. In the simplest possible terms, and using picture cards, talks, or lists on the board, the facilitator explains the CRC, stressing that all children have a right to survival, development, protection, and participation. The facilitator discusses the responsibility of adults, institutions, and states to ensure these rights to the children.

An exercise

The facilitator selects 16 to 20 cards with rights illustrated on them and distributes them to the children. After the children examine the cards, the facilitator asks them to explain the cards, which are displayed to the group. The facilitator helps explain the card, too, and asks the children to which cluster the card belongs. The children answer and place the card on the board under one of the four clusters (survival, protection, participation, development). The facilitator can use four colored sheets with four cluster titles on each sheet.

Learning Reinforcement*Group exercise: Make your rights poster*

The facilitator divides the children into groups, preferably through a game, and distributes flip charts, paper, crayons, etc. to each group. The facilitator asks the children to draw posters on “My Rights” in consultation with each other. The children may use pictures or text to convey the message. When completed, all posters are displayed. Group members explain the significance of their posters.

*Children around the world **

Children divide into groups or pairs and receive case stories. The facilitator reads stories to those who cannot read, and asks the children to discuss among themselves which right they are deprived of. Group leaders explain to all the children their case story, identifying which right has been violated.

DAY SIX: SESSION SIX

Objective: To understand the reality of right deprivation and learn how to negotiate for rights

Pre-learning

Music, songs, or games are selected for warm-up activities.

Using My Diary: My Reality and My Vision

The facilitator divides children into two groups with the help of a game and distributes diaries to all of them. The facilitator asks children in group A to write about or draw a picture of society as they see it, with reference to needs discussed in the previous sessions, and asks children in group B to write about or draw a picture of their vision of a society that meets children’s needs. The children then display their diaries and the facilitator asks them to discuss their work.

This workshop is the last unit of the module and it would be appropriate to display the diary tasks of all units to help children see how they are all connected. The facilitator allows time for discussion.

While Learning*How can we get our rights?*

This is not an easy question to answer. Most children know that they and others like them are denied some of these rights. The facilitator explains the difference between the ideal and real worlds. The children learn that many rights are denied to different people, especially women and children, in different parts of the world. The facilitator explains that the world is in transition and that advancement in education and economic well-being will greatly help promote children’s rights.

The facilitator suggests a role play on four different rights that the children feel they need urgently. Helped by the facilitator, the children then show how they would negotiate for their rights.

Group exercise

The facilitator divides the children into four groups with a game, asks them to recall the session on reality and vision, and asks them to do a problem-solving exercise, with guidance, on four different groups of rights:

Group A: The right to go to school. The children discuss the best way to persuade their employers or guardians to send them to school. The children come up with ideas they can enact.

Group B: The right to play. The children think of persuading their employers (or teachers!) to give them time off to play.

Group C: The right to be protected. The facilitator gives the children a case story where children feel they need to be protected. The children discuss how to negotiate this protection with relevant authorities, organizations, or persons.

Group D: The right to participate. With guidance, the children enact a story where children’s views should be heard because they could be useful to adults—on sanitation, for example, or on immunization and oral rehydration saline. The facilitator helps the children recall the child-to-child lesson plan of “My Health.”

The facilitator has the opportunity to make children understand the injustice of their situation, and to help them develop until they are able to educate their fellow children and community members on the meaning of respecting young people’s rights. The facilitator makes it clear that they are not to take on the risk or burden of claiming their rights. This should be the responsibility of adults.

Learning Reinforcement

The facilitator draws up questions on the 12 units and asks them through a short quiz to see what the children have learned. The facilitator may follow the quiz pattern in the annex of unit 06. This test should be held for two or four competing groups and followed by music, games, and awards, if possible. This activity could take another one to two hours, with enough time for the children to enjoy the test as well as the get-together.

* From *Children Around the World*, UNICEF.