

Needed : Schools To Educate, Not Confuse Children

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THE large number of contenders for the limited number of seats available in the government and private high schools and the discernable slant of the upper class toward an English medium education were all the encouragement the private entrepreneurs needed for entering the educational sector. Most preferred to set up small kindergartens and tutorials and, although many people if given the choice would prefer to admit their children into established institutions which guarantee a standard education, the scarcity of seats has made this desire increasingly difficult to fulfil with the result that the overflow, having nowhere else to go are opting for these English medium institutions. Today many parents have accepted the fact that schooling for their children is only possible in one of these schools that each year we witness a rush to attain a seat in one of the so-called "better" schools in this category.

This annual onslaught on the privately run kindergartens and English medium tutorials has resulted in a side-effect that is not at all healthy for children are being admitted into school at ever lower ages. Those who are opposed to this trend have a child's welfare at heart but, to their distress, find they are banging their heads against a proverbial brick wall in an effort to save the children from this unwarranted torture. But persuading parents of small children not to send their children to school at such an early age, or that by sending their child to school too soon they are working against a child's long-term interest, finds it is an impossible task. Yet they have the support of many of the child education experts who opine that, sending a child to school at too early an age, can cause problems later which may be impossible to undo.

The pressure to perform when they may not yet be ready to learn is also a factor to be considered for this type of pressure has such long-lasting effects on children and can damage their ability to learn for life. They say that, as children mature at different ages they are, therefore, not always ready to learn the same things at the same age. A good deal also depends on their backgrounds, for social status and culture play an important role in a child's ability to absorb learning. Some educationists even say that too much pressure on young minds can result in serious anti-social activities and in acts of violence, maladjustment and frequently — drug addiction. But in the quest for a "better" education, more and more parents are sending their children to school at a tender age.

Although we realise the value of pre-school education, so long as it is restricted to learning at play, there is danger in expecting too much from small children. We should therefore, be more concerned than we are about the over-all effect on a child's mind and this will be reflected in the psychological make-up of the child and in his physical and mental health. But there is another aspect that must be considered when evaluating education for tiny-tots for those seeking admission for their wards are driven by a fear that later on they will not be able to get admission at all. Most of these parents are from the middle classes who once sent their children to the renowned missionary schools. Most too are struggling to make ends meet and cannot really afford the dubious luxury of sending children to these schools but the driving force is twofold, one to keep up with technolo-

gical advancement and to keep up with the nouveau rich. All however, have the belief that only these schools can provide children with an international standard of education and a better social position.

This is, of course, true for, in our society, success in later life frequently depends on whom you know and with whom you went to school for old school ties tend to be very strong. But as the kindergartens and tutorials in Bangladesh do not have the atmosphere of an institution as did established schools of the past, as things stand now, this camaraderie is highly unlikely.

These schools also seem to lack a fixed curricula and some reports say that the syllabus is neither well thought out nor determined in advance and some even say when it is, it is on a "hit and miss" basis often made by the teachers themselves, most of whom are qualified. Even the books in general use are suspect. Mostly of Indian origin they contain so many grammatical mistakes it makes one's hair stand on end. The Nursery Rhyme books in use in most of the kindergartens have wandered so far off from the original versions that British children still learn at their mother's knees and anyone who knows them will be appalled. Even if anybody does attempt to correct the mistakes, it will result in children becoming even more confused. The question is, can we not publish our own rhymes books and other books as needed or do we have to go along with this wrong teaching simply because it is India?

Touching briefly on the exorbitant fees being charged for tuition. Owners justify the high fees by saying

their level of investment is high. But whether it is high enough to justify tuition fees in the range of Taka 1,500.00 for the lowest class to often fees that are more than 2,000.00 a month, not including tiffin or the cost of books, plus the additional charges for admission, library fees and laboratory fees etc. is increasingly doubtful. And as a new one has been recently added by some schools, a readmission fee for the second semester, this aspect of tuition should be looked into. These high charges also frequently appear to be too much for most parents who sometimes have to resort to taking up a teaching job themselves or take in students to help defray the cost. When asked why she sent her two daughters to such a costly private kindergarten when she obviously could not afford it, one lady of my acquaintance gave an answer that told it all. "I am not going to allow my children to suffer because they did not go to the right school?"

Although this is going away from the subject matter, another aspect of private schools fast emerging may be said to be a replica of a system in vogue in some of the more prestigious British public schools. (British public schools are privately run schools and should not be confused with the local definition of public schools). These schools required children to be registered with them at birth. Today in some of the local kindergartens, children must apply for admission one year ahead. It is also not out of place to mention here the "donation" system that is in vogue and which can be as much as Taka fifty thousand, guarantees a seat for your children. Sometimes an acquaintance in high circles can help a parent get the size of the "donation" reduced, but usually such requests are not entertained.