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CLOSING THE EDUCATION GAP IN INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

by CLYDE SANGER

The crowded classroom and the out-of-school youth. They are parallel problems that are common to nearly every country in Africa and Asia. But an experiment that has been going on for three years in some villages in Indonesia and the Philippines may demonstrate that there is an effective way to deal with these problems.

A few statistics, first, to indicate the growing size of this double-headed problem. In the dozen years between 1960 and 1972, thanks to a great effort among 44 independent states in Africa, the number of children enrolled in primary schools increased by about 16 million. The size of the effort can be measured from the fact that expenditure on education by those governments rose from 2.8 percent of their Gross National Product to an impressive 4.7 percent.

Yet, so great was the increase in population of those 44 countries during those years that, at the end of the period, there were an extra 3 million children in the 6 to 11 age-group who were getting no schooling at all. African states, with some exceptions, were falling further away from their target of universal primary education.

The pattern in Indonesia is similar. In 1972 some 13 million children were enrolled in primary schools, but another 7 million of that age-group never went to school. Even though enrolment was increasing by 2 percent a year, it could not catch up with the population increase which, like Africa's, was around 3 percent.

Another aspect of the problem is the training of all the extra teachers needed -- that is, if countries are going to keep a ratio of about one teacher to every 30 students. The African states found there was an awkward hiatus, after the increase of students had begun and before the extra teachers could be trained. The situation in the Philippines was awkward for a different reason:

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they had the trained teachers -- some 400,000 of them sufficient to deal with the present enrolment of 12 million students -- but about four-fifths of the education budget was being spent on their salaries. Dr Juan Manuel, the Secretary for Education, adds that it is impossible to think the country will be able to spend twice that amount on teachers' salaries in the year 2000, when the school population is likely to have doubled.

So what could the educational planners do? In Southeast Asia the ministers of education met and asked one of their research groups, the Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (Innotech), to experiment with possible solutions.

Two research teams, in Naga district of Cebu island in the central Philippines and near Solo in central Java, Indonesia, set out to devise an efficient delivery system for mass primary education. In 1974, with funding from Canada's International Development Research Centre and the active support of the Philippines and Indonesian governments, Innotech launched Project Impact.

Standing for Instruction Managed by Parents, Community and Teachers, Project Impact (or Proyek Pamong as it is known in Indonesia) draws on all the resources of the community. Yet it is not only parents and community leaders and skilled craftsmen who are to back up the teachers, but the older students as well who play the role of tutors and thus allow the professional teachers to spread their energy and time among many more pupils. Also, the children do as much learning as possible by themselves, singly or in peer groups.

The change has perhaps been greatest for the teacher. Retrained as an Instructional Supervisor (IS), the teacher supervises the learning process, organizes the non-professional assistants whether high school students doing (as in the Philippines) one full day's tutoring a month or (as in Indonesia) home tutoring in the evening at a neighbour's house and trains the older primary students (Grades 4 to 6) to tutor the children of the first three grades in reading, writing, comprehension or mathematics.

In Naga, instead of 10 teachers to a school, as there were in 1973, there are now only two or three, responsible for record keeping, remedial activities, monitoring and managing the pupils' learning activities. They can also move out into the village to draw in new resources, to keep in touch with parents and to encourage some adults to enrol as mature students.

A major effort during the first three years of the project has been the writing of the normal curriculum for Grades 4 to 6 into a set of easy to read

modules that the students can work through by themselves. The module writers (in Indonesia they are called subject specialists) compress a year's material for each subject, whether it is mathematics or social science or language, into a set of 30 modules. Each module takes two to four hours of a student's time and contains a series of tests.

For the younger students, in Grades 1 to 3, there are also modules but these are for the use of the programmed teachers, the older students who are given practice in the lesson they are to teach.

Anyone visiting the five villages in Naga district where the project is underway today would be surprised at the scene. The visitor would see small groups of students reading their modules together outside under thatched shelters ("kiosks") put up by village volunteers. Classroom partition walls have been removed and the school building today is an open airy space where students come to take post-tests after completing each module. Their answers are checked by an instructional aide. The building is also used for storing the modules, resource materials, simple science equipment and for administration.

After three years, the results have been encouraging enough for Innotech, with IDRC support, to extend the experiment to two other sites in the Philippines while the Malaysians have started a similar scheme on their own initiative, also with IDRC support. The IDRC recently published a 54 page booklet describing in detail what has been happening at Naga and Solo.

Neither the booklet nor the two project leaders, Rosetta Mante in Naga and Boorham Respati in Solo, deny that there have been some problems during the experimental period of the program. One is the problem of strengthening the programmed teaching in the lower grades, working to give them a sound basis in a second language so that by level 4 they can learn rapidly on their own. In Naga, there is difficulty in enlisting enough programmed teachers as many of the older students feel the teaching duties take a large amount of time they would prefer to devote to their own studies. Concern has also been expressed by the staff at Naga that a number of students are taking advantage of the system's flexibility and are absenting themselves from school. In the two years remaining for the experiment, efforts are being made to solve these problems.

But the children have taken well to modularized learning, and tests given to compare their work with work done in traditional schools show they are scoring consistently higher marks. The costs of this system compare well with those of the normal school.

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The expectations that Project Impact can make an important contribution to the problem of providing elementary school education to the ever increasing numbers of children remain high. If it succeeds, it will have served its purpose. Meanwhile, educational planners from Liberia and Jamaica have visited the project sites and talked with INNOTECH director Dr Liceria Soriano to determine the appropriateness of the program for their national requirements. It is living up to its name and having an impact.

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Project Impact, an experiment in mass primary education, by Clyde Sanger is available from the Distribution Unit, Publications Division, IDRC. P.O. Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada, KIG 3H9.

At Uling school in the Philippines, Rosita is both a teacher and a student. So are all the other children.

PHOTO: Clyde Sanger
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