

## Letters from Abroad

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### East Pakistani Children Learn about the United States

MY WORK began at the Armenitola Government School for Boys in Dacca on October 27, 1952. The school, which is attached to the Teachers' Training College, has an enrollment of 500 boys in classes three to ten. The faculty members number sixteen (all male) including the Headmaster and an Assistant Headmaster. Teachers are friendly, helpful and apologetic, and I have often to remind them that the educational system of America had its beginning a few centuries past.

The curriculum of the school is geared to the matriculation examinations. A great deal of emphasis is placed, therefore, on the learning of factual materials. Classes are held five and a half days per week, Sundays through noon on Thursdays. The medium of instruction through class four is Bengali, the mother tongue of East Pakistanis. Urdu and English are taught from class five, with Arabic and Sanskrit added at the seventh level. An element of tremendous importance in the school is the formal discipline, practiced by teachers and students alike, which does not lend itself to creativity or to growth in self-direction.

My assignment, the teaching of "Conversational English" in classes seven,

eight and nine, proved very interesting and informative for me as well as for the boys. In my first informal talk I pointed out a need for the development of understanding, appreciation and wholesome attitudes of peoples towards one another throughout the world. Because our world continues to grow smaller, drawing peoples into closer and closer relationship with each other, it is imperative that we as teachers begin our efforts to promote world understanding with children.

#### Planning with East Pakistani Children

In our first pupil-teacher planning period, I discovered among other things:

1. Pupils were eager to learn about life in the United States.
2. Pupils desired to make friends with children in the United States.
3. The minds of many of the pupils were filled with exaggerated and distorted notions about the United States.
4. Interests and desires of pupils were not different from those of pupils in our own country.
5. Pupils showed little or no knowledge of common courtesies.
6. Pupils showed little or no interest

in joining a committee to work on a problem.

7. Most of the pupils who experienced difficulty in expressing themselves orally wrote very well.

8. These same pupils could grasp the meaning of a statement more readily when this was written on the blackboard.

9. Drawing inferences and seeing relationships were seemingly neglected areas.

The time element and type of curriculum organization were crucial factors in planning our program of work. A forty minute period once per week was hardly enough time to give to each interest area mentioned by the students, more especially since we had to proceed at an unusually slow pace due to the language difficulty.

In order to make the most of each brief period, and to lead the students to focus their attention and enthusiasm upon aspects of the United States which I thought would have value for them, I found it helpful to hold informal conversations with them, and to establish a socialized working relationship among each class group as a whole. These experiences, entirely new to the group, also proved very successful in helping to attain these objectives:

1. To develop skill in oral and written expression.
2. To develop understanding and appreciation of life in the United States.

After making our list of things to be found out and things to be done, we drew up a plan by which our list of tasks would be executed and by whom. In our class activities we included planning sessions, reading from certain materials supplied by the United States Information Service, singing American songs, reviewing films on American life, listening to lectures, participating in discussions, and visiting the U.S.I.S.

Individuals and small committees were chosen to report on specific topics, to interview certain persons, to write letters, or to bring in additional materials as needed. Areas studied were:

- School Life of American Boys
- Sports in America
- Detroit, Home of the Automobile
- New York, Home of the Skyscrapers
- Industries
- Administration of Government
- Examinations in American Schools
- Daily Life of the Ordinary Citizen in America
- How the Government Educates Its Citizens
- System of Primary Education and the Education of Girls in America.

The culminating activity centered around "Learning About Life in the U.S.A." This activity, which I deem an indication that pupils had accomplished many of their goals, may also be regarded as part of our evaluation.

In considering the degree of pupil growth in terms of the purposes of education, my impressions are as follows:

1. Our ways of working together as a class, as individuals, and as small committees seemed very effective in promoting friendship, teamwork, interest, understanding, pupil initiative and the desire for further knowledge and information on the various aspects of life in the United States.
2. Through oral presentations, written reports and practice exercises as needed in writing, speaking, spelling, growth was assisted in the skill of intercommunication.
3. Teacher-pupil relationships, which for the first few meetings seemed strained, became cordial, warm and friendly, and were characterized by a "let's find out" attitude.

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