

## Adult Literacy in Kenya

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WHEN devising a programme for adult literacy in Kenya, problems of method do not figure highly in the difficulties encountered. So much work has been done recently in other under-developed countries on the methodology of teaching adults that, although it has to pass through the filter of our needs and be adapted to local conditions, we are in fact, relieved of much original experiment and research. It has been found that the issue of a simple handbook on techniques, a two-day course, and some supervision, enable the average experienced teacher to get along happily in an adult class. This is important, because our problems, which worry us every day, are chiefly those of organisation.

The first difficulty, of course, which is common to all countries lacking a buoyant economy based on a peasant-grown cash crop, is acute shortage of funds. The amount already spent on education is a severe burden on the Colony's revenue, and no-one would agree to any of this being diverted to adult work. All that can be hoped for from the central Government, even with I.C.A. aid, is the wages and travelling expenses of one officer for each Province, to co-ordinate the work. Local government bodies, particularly African district councils and municipalities, are sometimes willing to co-operate financially, but in the main the classes have to be self-supporting out of fees raised from the students.

Even if money were available, it could not profitably be used to hire teachers. There are practically no unemployed teachers in Kenya today. Many districts, particularly the backward ones, are now hampered in their development programmes, not by lack of funds, but by shortage of teachers, and, contrary to what has been found elsewhere, experience over the last few years has shown that the enthusiastic amateur is not nearly so successful in teaching adults as the trained teacher, whose personal academic level may be much lower. It would seem that there is no real substitute for the man who is accustomed to the discipline of teaching for regular hours. Even a hospital assistant, with a good school certificate, was found to be less effective than the lowest-grade trained teacher who replaced him in the same class.

Then it must be remembered that to most Bantu, education is a vendible commodity. The student does not expect to get it for nothing, any more than the teacher expects to give it without recompense. The great popularity of correspondence courses (for which the fees are often high) demonstrates this point. It is therefore unrealistic, except in Nilo-Hamitic districts and those cities where the spirit of public service has been popular-

ised, to depend on volunteer teachers in the classes. And while the organising staff is so few (because suitable men are not available, and there is no money to pay them) volunteers often prove a great nuisance. There is no way to persuade them back to work should they tire of it, and the result is that a promising class stops at once.

Finally, we have to try and ensure that a first burst of enthusiasm does not fade out, leaving the teacher facing a handful of pupils, whose fees are insufficient to keep the class running. If the same people attend regularly, the sort of progress is made which shows the good results obtainable and redounds highly to the popularity of the classes. But irregular attendance splits the class up into sections, slows down progress, and discourages the teacher as well as the students.

#### **"The impossible takes a little longer"**

The way in which adult literacy classes are at present organised in Kenya is an attempt to minimise the difficulties listed above. It has been found absolutely necessary to relieve the Provincial Literacy Officer (and his staff if he is lucky enough to have any) of the details of management, so that he is free to concentrate on professional supervision. In a province therefore, the work must be organised territorially, through local managers. This is in accordance with the expressed Government policy, which reserves to the Education Department only the professional control of adult work, and desires to see it administered as a social service under local government control. These managers may be African district or location councils, having perhaps jurisdiction over a score of literacy centres, or county and municipal councils, who may have anything between two and twenty, or individual settlers or factory owners, who exercise managerial functions over one centre only. In settled areas, the authority may be further devolved on the mission agency which supervises the day-school on which the adult classes are based. The Manager is properly registered as such under the current Education Ordinance, and is responsible for collecting fees, purchasing equipment, paying the agreed honorarium to the teachers, and generally fostering the classes.

The only link between all these managements, of which there will ultimately be nearly 50 in Rift Valley Province, is through the Provincial Literacy Officer. He is an Education Officer who has training and experience in the work, and who is a member of the staff of the Provincial Education Officer. His tasks are to advise local managers or management committees, to draw up curricula and equipment lists, to train the teachers engaged in the work, and to inspect classes in session as often as possible. It would also be desirable for him to have a statistical picture of progress in the whole Province, but this is not easy in the earlier stages, partly because of poor communications, and partly because it is desirable to let managers settle down to their task before asking them for returns.

The actual instruction of classes is done, in the main, by teachers in the schools where they teach the children by day. In some places it is necessary to employ extra instructors and in others for the classes to meet at some other place than at a school. It has been agreed that all teachers may teach a maximum of 54 hours overtime in a term, of which not more than four-and-a-half hours may be done in any one week. What this usually means is three sessions of one-and-a-half hours a week, for twelve weeks in the term. For his fee of Shs 7/- a term, the student receives this period, and all the necessary books. The teacher's remuneration is Shs. 30/- a month. Within this general framework, local managers handle the actual day-to-day administration. The content of the classes is Literacy, first in the vernacular, and then in simple English, and some Arithmetic; the syllabus is arranged in three independent units.

The age-range of the classes, of course, is very wide, up to thirty years being common, but this causes less trouble in practice than might be expected. Adults have priority, but adolescents are admitted where there is room for them, and when they have access to no other form of education. In the classroom itself, students of all ages appear to be perfectly happy together, but of course the teacher's task is more difficult.

It is necessary to remember that this organisation is really a compromise between devising a framework which makes control easy over a wide area, and allowing local freedom for experiment. The defect of the first is excessive rigidity, and of the second, anarchy and some political risk.

In Kenya, the complete 12-year course leading to School Certificate is divided into three equal four-year portions, called primary, intermediate and secondary. Promotion from the primary to the intermediate level is determined by a provincial competitive entrance examination, and at the end of the intermediate level, school children take the Colony-wide Kenya African Preliminary examination, which is both a 'Certificate' examination and also the qualifying examination for secondary education. It is obviously desirable that adult courses should follow the same pattern as closely as possible, not so much for administrative tidiness as because the people have been used to this system and would view any serious departure from it with suspicion.

We may therefore say that the adult literacy stage corresponds roughly with primary education. Some of our aims, i.e., literacy and number work, are identical, but we shall not be doing the same amount of work as the primary school on other academic subjects. We have no comparable examination to pass, and we are anxious not to introduce other subjects until these can be taught using English as the medium of instruction.

Whereas literacy (i.e. primary) classes are going well in several parts of the Colony, the pilot schemes for the intermediate level are only now just under way. These classes are distinguished by being called evening

continuation classes. Naturally, these will be fewer in number, but it is hoped just as popular and useful.

#### Some more problems

In projecting these continuation classes, certain problems of organisation are encountered which are additional to those to be faced in the primary-literacy stage. At that level, we are fairly certain that wherever a primary school exists, there will be teachers already posted to that school who are capable of giving the elementary instruction needed, and also that there will be sufficient adults living near by to create classes of an economic size. But if the evening continuation classes are to correspond to the intermediate level, it is axiomatic that they must be based on well-staffed children's intermediate schools, for nowhere else will there be teachers capable of giving the necessary instruction. Of course, intermediate schools are not nearly so numerous as primary schools. At the moment the Colony has only one intermediate school for every four primaries. Further, it is by no means certain that even where the facilities are available, there will be enough students of a high enough grade to take advantage of them. It would seem, therefore, that for the moment such classes will only be possible in towns, where the conditions are favourable.

The purpose of these classes will be to prepare students for the external Standard VIII examination, which is an alternative to the Kenya African Preliminary examination mentioned above. This alternative is of equivalent standard but omits practical subjects, and can be taken by anyone, since it does not demand the same attendance qualifications as the Kenya African Preliminary examination.

It is expected that demand for continuation classes will come from two groups of students:

- (a) at the upper end, from those who have already attended an intermediate school, failed the Kenya African Preliminary examination, and who are now in employment, but would welcome the chance of obtaining the paper qualification,
- (b) at the lower end, from students who have exhausted the possibilities of the adult literacy classes, and from young men and women who completed a formal primary education, but did not succeed in gaining admission to an intermediate school.

It is envisaged that, ultimately, the continuation classes will offer the full four-year course from Standard V to Standard VIII, as in a day intermediate school, taking a new Standard V each year, as the old Standard VIII leaves. In the first instance, however, it will be very difficult to get economic classes at all levels, and almost impossible to sort out, in the middle grades, the previous standard reached by prospective students. We have started, therefore, in the pilot scheme with Standards V and VIII only. To the latter are admitted those who have previously tried the Kenya African Preliminary examination and failed; priority in Standard

V is given to promotions from the adult literacy classes, but vacant places are filled by those who can prove that they have had primary education elsewhere. A Standard VIII will be taken in, if there is demand for it, for two more years, until the first Standard V reaches that level.

Control of these continuation classes will again be in the hands of a local committee, which will be responsible for levying fees and making payments. The fees will have to be substantially larger than those charged in the literacy stage. Even if there are four or five sessions a week, a lot of work will remain to be done at home on an assignment basis. This means a proportionate amount of marking for the teachers, and it will clearly be impossible for one teacher to take each class within the four-and-a-half hours overtime he is allowed to do each week. It is therefore necessary to have two teachers for each class, each specialising as far as possible in his own subjects. The content of the course will correspond almost exactly to the syllabus for intermediate schools, omitting practical subjects.

It will be seen, therefore, that the evening continuation classes are a natural and necessary counterpart to the adult literacy scheme. Many students will feel unable through age or other reasons to proceed beyond the literacy stage; some will be unable to do so because they live too far from an intermediate school. But the important thing is to offer the adult student exactly the same chance of reaching the first academic milestone as his more fortunate child who is enjoying formal schooling.

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