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Courier



LITERACY
the ladder of achievement



THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP

*by the Director-General
of Unesco*

WE live in an age of grave uncertainties and immense hopes, an age in which all the nations of the world are, for the first time, joined in a single network of reciprocal relationships. Their destinies are henceforth interdependent, and the scientific and technological resources at their disposal could enable them to solve the bulk of their most urgent problems.

But in order to do this, they must stand united in their purpose and combine their efforts as they face a common future. In other words, humanity must prove capable of making a transition from interdependence to solidarity.

The practice of solidarity requires that each one of us should be always at the disposal of those who, however far away they may be, remain and must remain, our neighbours.

Solidarity cannot be enforced; it is lived.

ONE of Unesco's fundamental tasks is to bring solidarity into effective being, for only solidarity can weave a fabric of friendship capable of uniting peoples and individuals from different cities, countries and continents.

And so today I am appealing to each of you to take part in a campaign of solidarity involving the *Unesco Courier*.

You who are a reader of the *Unesco Courier*, think of someone who is unknown to you and is yet your brother, of someone who because of his living conditions often feels alien to you, someone to whom the *Unesco Courier* can reveal all that brings you together and unites you. Offer him a subscription and thus contribute to Unesco's efforts in favour of peace and friendship between men.

By so doing you can help make the *Unesco Courier* the authentic voice of universal solidarity.

Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow

(For details of how to offer a "friendship" subscription see coupon opposite).



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“The hand of friendship” is the name of a solidarity campaign which gives Unesco Courier readers the opportunity to offer a gift subscription to someone who is unknown to them and who is materially unable to become a subscriber. The World Federation of Unesco Clubs and Associations is associated with the campaign as part of its efforts to promote international exchanges worldwide. The Federation will be responsible for establishing the chain of solidarity between present and future readers, who will then be free to make contact and become friends.

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Editorial

IT can never be too strongly affirmed that the struggle against illiteracy must and will continue so long as a single man or woman is thereby excluded from the world of knowledge and deprived of the possibility of making for himself or herself those vital decisions that affect each individual's life.

Illiteracy, however, is more than just an individual handicap; it is also perhaps the most important impediment to the social and technological emancipation of the peoples of the developing world and one of the major factors contributing to the widening of the gap between the industrialized and the less developed countries.

Finally, it constitutes an obstacle to the interpenetration and mutual enrichment of dif-

ferent cultures. Learning to read and write not only helps to consolidate one's own cultural roots, it also opens the door to knowledge of other cultures.

The effects of illiteracy are also felt in the richer countries, the daily-increasing complexity of whose structures multiplies the difficulties faced by the non-literate.

From its beginnings, Unesco has played a leading role in promoting and guiding the world struggle against illiteracy. And though in certain sectors some success has been achieved and the tide of illiteracy has to some extent been turned back, under pressure of world population growth the absolute number of illiterates continues to rise.

The pursuit of literacy cam-

paigns is therefore a matter of overriding urgency. In this issue of the Unesco Courier we attempt to give a picture, however incomplete, of the present status of literacy campaigns around the world and to highlight some of the prerequisites for greater effectiveness and success. Of these, it now emerges, the foremost and most imperative is that, in the planning of literacy campaigns, full account be taken of differences of environment, of the traditions and specific interests of each cultural milieu. As one of our contributors writes "people are not made literate, they make themselves literate".

Cover: Wall painting in the Tepito district of Mexico City.
Photo © Populart, Oullins, France

'A MORAL IMPERATIVE'

by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow

THE eradication of illiteracy represents a moral imperative for the international community. The reasons for this are evident. It is sufficient to consider the number of illiterates, an estimated 824 million in 1980 or 29 per cent of the adult population, a number which is constantly on the increase even as the rate of illiteracy slowly declines.

If present trends continue, there will be 900 million illiterates towards the end of the century. Illiteracy is generally closely associated with poverty. It is most widespread in the most deprived areas of those countries which have the least resources, and among the most destitute sections of the population—those that suffer from serious inadequacies as regards food, health and



housing or who are affected by unemployment.

The persistence of widespread illiteracy is a major impediment to development, and makes it impossible for millions of men and women to take their destinies into their own hands. It condemns to failure the fight against poverty, the elimination of inequalities and the attempts to establish relations of equity and justice between both individuals and nations.

Unesco's strategy and actions in favour of literacy have evolved over the years to reflect the experience acquired by Unesco and its Member States. Thus the programme approved by the recently concluded 22nd session of the General Conference for the 1984-1985 biennium contains several noteworthy innovations.

The most important of these is the adoption of a global strategy whereby action for generalization and renewal of primary education—the only means of attacking illiteracy at its very root—is combined with literacy education for young people and adults. It is a fact that illiteracy thrives on the inadequacy of primary education. There are today some 120 million children of primary school age who do not have the opportunity to attend school and who, if adequate measures are not taken, will swell the ranks of adult illiterates in the future. Sixty per cent of these children cut off from school are girls, the women and mothers of tomorrow whose role and influence in every sphere of life are of decisive importance.

But even many of those fortunate enough to attend school will not necessarily pursue their studies long enough or receive an education of a sufficient quality and relevance to their lives to enable them to achieve an enduring level of literacy. Hence, the extension and reform of primary education is an indispensable element in any realistic strategy to overcome illiteracy.

Unesco's programme also gives immediate attention to an alarming phenomenon—the relapse into illiteracy of many young people and adults. Studies must be undertaken to diagnose this complex problem systematically.

Another aspect of the problem of illiteracy which has recently attracted the attention of researchers is the notion of "functional illiteracy". With the rapid development of science and technology, the level of literacy required to cope with the demands of social and economic life is rising. The measure of "functional literacy" is not fixed, but is steadily advancing. For example, the level of instruction which qualified one for employment yesterday may not suffice tomorrow.

It is only by acquiring literacy skills that each individual begins to become a full and active member of his culture, is able to benefit from the accumulated wealth of knowledge and know-how and takes part in the collective process of reflection on the implications of his society's evolution—in a word becomes a full-fledged citizen.

While its elimination requires first and foremost a strong national commitment, illiteracy has become a problem of truly planetary dimensions. Its eradication also calls for efforts on a world-wide scale and in particular for international co-operation reinforced by a greater concern than in the past for the fundamental human requirements of authentic development.

I therefore appeal once again to all those in positions of authority to increase the total volume of aid devoted to literacy work, thus enabling the upward trend in the absolute number of illiterates to be halted, then reversed, before the end of the century. In this way we shall ensure that we enter the new millennium in a climate of liberty, creativity and progress for all. ■

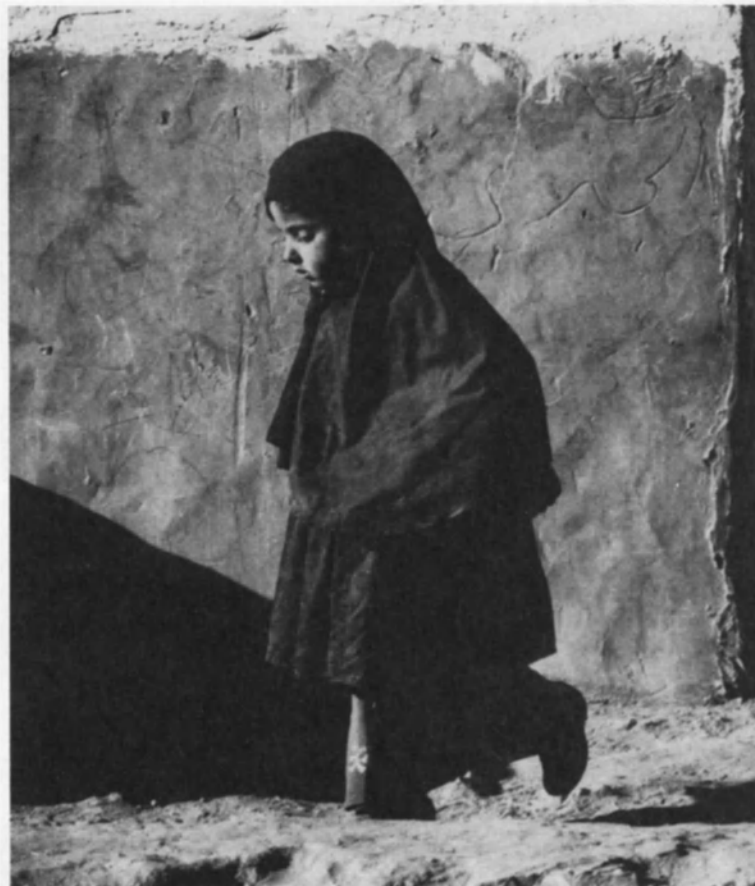


Photo © Hélène Parat, Paris

The cultural roots of literacy

by Marcos Guerra

COMMON sense dictates that the features of a people's cultural identity should be integrated into the process of teaching them to become literate. Why, then, has this principle not always been understood? Why is it not systematically and scrupulously applied today?

At the present time both the Third World countries and the industrialized countries are equally preoccupied with the question of educating and making literate their adults and young people. A sound approach would be to examine what has happened in the recent past in order to determine how many educational activities have failed because of lack of respect for the

MARCOS GUERRA, from northeastern Brazil, is a consultant on education and development problems with Unesco and other organizations of the United Nations system, and with several European non-governmental organizations. He has taken part in literacy campaigns in Brazil and directed projects for the training of supervisory staff in Niger and the Ivory Coast.

cultural values of the populations with which they were concerned. In a broader perspective, how many political measures and how many development projects have suffered as a result of contempt for these values?

All educational activities are, in our opinion, essentially cultural in the sense given them by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (see article page 29). It is not enough simply to *respect* cultural identity. We must endeavour to *integrate as fully as possible* into the educational process the values of the culture, the civilization and the society to which we have come to live and work. This integration is essential not for educational, economic, psychological or political reasons, nor in order to save time—although each one of these reasons may be justified—but because these values are part and parcel of the educational process, which would be incomplete without them and could foment resistance among the learners.

If the requisite political commitment, and coherent, realistic policies are forth-

coming, it may reasonably be hoped that some countries will be able to eradicate illiteracy before the end of this century or else reduce it to an insignificant level. But it is no secret that for millions of people in other countries, inability to read and write will aggravate the difficulties of their daily lives and make it harder for them to be fully integrated into the societies in which they live, to achieve access to the services these societies offer, and to share in the wealth, privileges and responsibilities that are traditionally reserved for an élite. Whether the masses will have an opportunity to live easier lives or whether they will be banished to the fringe of society may hinge on the choice of educational policies and the integration of cultural values into these policies.

With few exceptions the early literacy programmes wrongly equated illiteracy with lack of culture. Traces of this attitude still survive but fortunately nowadays they encounter another form of cultural resistance which rules out the kind of genocide of which Latin American civiliza-

Pestles and mortars for grinding millet attract potential buyers at the market held during an annual festival at Touba in Senegal. Although in many cases they may be illiterate, market traders and their customers in Third World countries often display dazzling capacities for totting up prices at lightning speed.

Photo © Denis Fogelgesang, Metz, France



Strong incentives are needed to provide adults with the motivation to undertake and persist in the considerable effort required to achieve literacy. Such incentives may take a variety of forms: cultural, religious, economic or political. Below, patients register for vaccination in northern Brazil. Bottom, young Tibetan monks learn to write in the Buddhist monastery of Mamali, Himachal Pradesh, India.



Pieces of reed, bark and bitter herb entwine to form a "message-knot", above, which marked the conclusion of peace between two peoples of New Caledonia. The knot proclaims that "here is thatch and bark for you to rebuild your houses, and there is no longer any bitterness between us". It is an example of the ways in which oral civilizations use non-written systems of symbols for memorizing, organizing and expressing thought.



Photo René Burri © Magnum, Paris

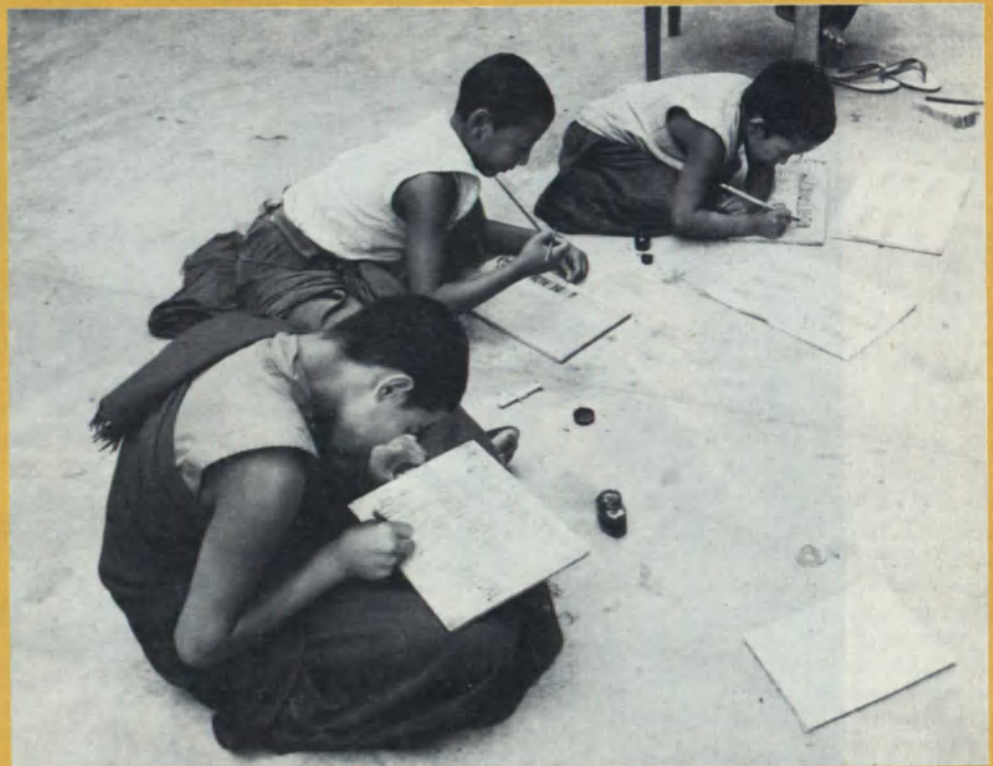


Photo © François Dupuy, Paris

► tions, among others, have been the victims.

Decisions relating to the language in which literacy is taught, to the ways in which written calculations are performed, and to the choice of the methods and content of cultural action are directly linked to this respect for cultures and the integration of their values. The choice of techniques and materials and the definition of "sensitization" and post-literacy programmes present opportunities to integrate or exclude important aspects of national cultures. This means power-sharing: programmes and policies should no longer be defined by specialists alone but should democratically bring in those who are defending their culture.

Astonishing though it may seem, literacy work in a given country almost always gives rise to a vast network of simultaneous and continuous action. It calls for a degree of assiduity and devotion often more important than the activities of a political party. Young people and adults who meet to learn together are often far more motivated than when they come into contact with other public services, including medical dispensaries. But this tightly-knit permanent network is only used in a downwards direction: the message is transmitted, the programme is followed, people learn to read and write. They are transformed, and so is the leader of their group. But the channels which transmit information upwards, enabling cultural values to emerge and express themselves and enriching the process of exchange, often function less well when they cannot be easily quantified. Or else such channels exist outside the field of action of literacy work and do not always influence the educational process itself.

It is also necessary to keep policies and programmes relevant and up-to-date. In revolutionary societies in the throes of change we have come across avant-garde militants carrying out literacy programmes and using textbooks that have not been modified in any way for almost ten years.

In Africa it is still often possible to find literacy programmes into which notions of cultural identity have not been integrated. There are various reasons for this. Some are straightforward, such as the fact that it is only relatively recently that the importance of these questions has come to be appreciated, or in any case that they were not given sufficient consideration by specialists when national policies were being prepared. Some are more complex, such as those relating to the major difficulty of working out a coherent policy for the choice of the language in which literacy is to be taught; this difficulty arose from the necessity to use a so-called language of national unity (often that of the former colonial power) instead of one which might accentuate internal differences and be harmful to national unity and sovereignty.

In literacy work and in the education of adults and young people, the question of language is of paramount importance, not only because it is an essential medium of expression for a culture and a civilization but also because it is an essential medium of communication. The choice of a language other than the mother tongue in which to achieve literacy, if it is justified, makes it necessary to develop other forms of cultural expression which will not reinforce literacy and its gains but which may strengthen cultural identity. This choice imposes a double task on illiterate people: literacy and acculturation.

As far as arithmetic is concerned, an attentive observer soon realizes that an illiterate person who is incapable of noting down either the processes whereby he performs a calculation or even the final result is nevertheless often capable of doing complicated sums. Even the casual visitor to Third World countries can see people playing cards or traditional games in the streets, or skilfully dealing at market with merchants who display astonishing gifts for mental arithmetic. For some time mathematicians and information scientists have been taking an interest in popular games played in the Third World, largely by people who are illiterate yet can do arithmetic at lightning speed.

The challenge facing us is to take into account all these factors as well as the experience and knowledge accumulated over generations and exclusively transmitted by the oral tradition and with the aid of certain non-written materials. Any coherent literacy and education policy for young people and adults is bound to mobilize these values and give them a place in the educational process, to stimulate critical thinking about them, and to foster a dialogue and confrontation between them and new values in our interdependent world.

The courage, perseverance and tenacity of those who learn to read and write is well known. Integrating the values of their cultural identity can only stimulate their work. But it is vitally important that the objectives of educational policies and programmes should be tailored, through a democratic consensus, to the needs and aspirations of illiterate people.

■ Marcos Guerra



Photo Paolo Koch © Rapho, Paris

Deep in thought as they ponder their next move, these two Kenyans are playing *wari*, a game of skill played with pieces such as nuts or dry beans on a board divided into compartments. *Wari* is one of many similar games found in different parts of the world. Generally known as *mancala* games, they have been played for thousands of years in Egypt, spread through parts of Asia and Africa, and were taken to the West Indies by African slaves.

Where there's a will...

Changing societies and motivation to learn



Photo © Bernard Guillien/Terres Lointaines, Paris

Above, women in Niger form a human chain to haul water from a well. Niger is one of the world's 31 least developed countries. In 11 of these countries less than 10 per cent of the female population is literate, and in 4 of them female literacy is less than 0.6 per cent. In all of them illiterate women outnumber illiterate men.

by Marcel de Clerck

MARCEL DE CLERCK, of Belgium, has had a long career with Unesco as an educator and a rural development specialist. He served as regional adviser for adult education at Unesco's Regional Office for Asia in Bangkok, before assuming responsibility at Unesco headquarters for the training of literacy teaching personnel. He is the author of *The Operational Seminar: a Pioneering Method of Training for Development (Unesco, 1976)* and *L'Éducateur et le Villageois, de l'éducation de base à l'alphabétisation fonctionnelle ('The Educator and the Villager, from basic education to functional literacy')* which will be published later this year.

FROM the point of view of those who direct literacy campaigns, to be illiterate in the twentieth century is a scourge, and its eradication an act of social justice. But what is the opinion of the illiterates themselves? Do they consider learning to read and write as something important, necessary, or desirable? How will they receive the literacy programme? Will they rush *en masse* to the classes that are opened for their benefit, or will they shun the generous efforts of those who promote the campaign? What motivations or situations could possibly encourage illiterates to take

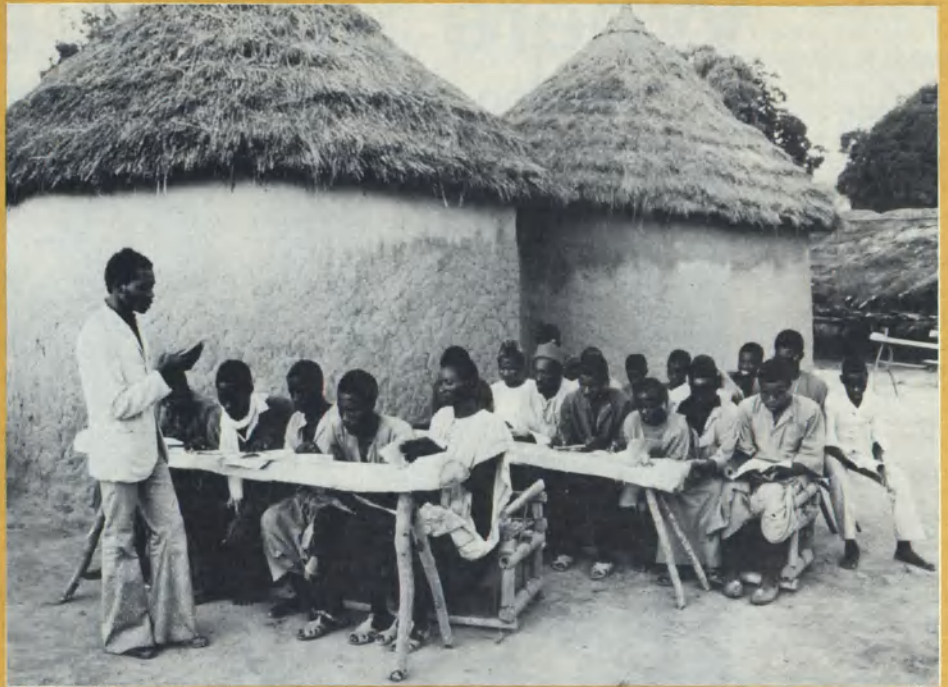
an interest in acquiring literacy?

The essential factor in any literacy operation is the milieu in which it takes place. Generally speaking, the rate of illiteracy of a given community has a direct effect on the attitudes and behaviour of its members in regard to literacy training. Experience proves that the attitudes towards literacy training, and especially towards writing, of individuals who belong to a milieu where illiteracy is still widespread can differ enormously from those encountered in a milieu where illiteracy survives only as a residual phenomenon. For ease of analysis, let us consider four distinct milieux in regard to illiteracy.

A pre-literate milieu, typified on the ►

With the aid of the International Development Association (IDA), an affiliate of the World Bank, the Government of Mali undertook between 1973 and 1978 the second phase of an integrated rural development programme called "Operation Arachide". The programme englobed the supply of equipment to farmers, agricultural research, the improvement of medical and veterinary services, and an expanded functional literacy programme. Right, Malian villagers learn to read and write in a village in the Kita area.

Photo © Ray Witlin, World Bank/IDA



► communications level by orality, and in which recourse to oral communication predominates almost exclusively in the manifold relations of everyday life, is a milieu in which life is lived as though writing and the printed word did not exist. The few literate individuals one encounters behave as if they had never learned to read. The illiteracy rate in a milieu of this type can exceed 75 per cent. There are insufficient motivations to awaken sustained interest in a rudimentary literacy programme of the traditional type, considered as an end in itself.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that a pre-literate milieu is impervious to every kind of literacy programme. In Chad, very high illiteracy rates have been observed amongst the Sara of the Middle Chari—83 per cent amongst men and 99 per cent amongst women. Nevertheless the programme for teaching written arithmetic has been extraordinarily successful both amongst men and women. True, this education, limited to the teaching of counting and addition, was aimed at enabling peasants to market the cotton they produced. It enabled them to check the weight and value of their crops, in other words, to create a self-managed market. There was no question of a traditional literacy programme, which had no interest for them, but of training them to cope with a problem situation of which they had direct experience.

The second milieu is predominantly illiterate but already includes a minority of literates. Contrary to what happens in a pre-literate milieu, the latter behave as literates. A milieu of this type has an illiteracy rate which corresponds roughly to between 50 and 75 per cent of the adult population. Motivation in regard to literacy training confined to the teaching of reading and writing is still very poor.

While literacy training of the traditional

type has little lasting success in a milieu of this kind, a literacy operation conceived as a component part of structured action aimed at achieving socio-economic and political changes in the interests of development has a good chance of succeeding if it is well conducted, as is proved by the national literacy campaign conducted in the United Republic of Tanzania as part of the *Ujamaa* programme and which succeeded in reducing the illiteracy rate of the adult population from 67 per cent in 1967 to 39 per cent in 1976, since when it has continued to decline. It is now reported to be lower than 10 per cent.

The third case is that of a milieu which is becoming literate. A majority of persons practise reading and writing for private or collective purposes. In theory the illiteracy rate in such a milieu is between 25 per cent and 50 per cent. The bulk of the illiterates is normally composed of women and the older generation. Motivation for becoming literate varies.

In the village of Khanh Hân in Vietnam, where we conducted an opinion poll about literacy training in 1958 and where the literacy rate was already nearly 70 per cent, the few men who were still illiterate were ashamed to be so. They dared not take part in the public activities of their community for fear of being mocked on account of their ignorance. In this Vietnamese village, illiterates behaved as though they were mentally handicapped, social outcasts.

Finally there is the literate milieu with an illiteracy rate of less than 25 per cent, where it is normal to be able to read and write and where this norm is recognized and accepted by the vast majority of the people. Here, illiteracy is to be encountered only in small groups of people on the fringe of society, or amongst isolated individuals. In a milieu of this type, where most communications are conveyed by the written or printed word, illiteracy is tending to become an

anachronism. At every step the illiterate is confronted by the imperative need to master the alphabet. In San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, the literacy classes were overcrowded and illiterates were obliged to enter their names on waiting lists. Some of them had to wait for nearly a year.



In 1970 only about ten of the world's least developed countries had a literacy rate of 20 per cent. By 1980, 19 of these countries had exceeded this rate and in 10 of them over 40 per cent of the population had achieved literacy. Above, a schoolgirl from Bangladesh.



The United Republic of Tanzania's National Institute for Productivity was established in 1965 with the aid of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide training courses for management staff. Left, trainee supervisors study sisal stacking in a Dar es Salaam warehouse.

Photo ILO, Geneva

And yet it was a literacy course of the most traditional type.

The illiteracy rate of a given milieu not only indicates the numerical size of the problem, it also provides valuable information for deciding which strategy to adopt for its elimination. Obviously an 80 per cent illiteracy rate calls for a different type of action than a rate of 20 or 15 per cent. Every literacy campaign requires a policy, objectives, an approach, a time-table and even a methodology which meet the specific needs of the situation. Success depends on this diversified approach to the problem in terms of the milieu.

Illiteracy is, in fact, an element of underdevelopment which cannot be dealt with in isolation, as though it were independent of that complex phenomenon. Illiteracy is synonymous with the absence of change. It is linked to the reproduction of social models that repeat the past. Literacy training is in itself a change—the transition from an oral culture to one based on the written word. But it is a change which occurs in a given society only after other changes caused by forces that may be either internal or external to the milieu, such as national reconstruction, the setting-up of a new society, the transition from a subsistence to a market economy—all forms of development action which imply a dynamic of change.

In the eyes of the population literacy training then becomes a significant, motivating activity whose essential aim is adaptation to the changes affecting society. The success of the United Republic of Tanzania's national literacy campaign is due to the fact that it forms part of a much larger campaign whose aim is to transform the countryside in depth, to create *Ujamaa* villages (still called development villages) and democratically administered communities.

Literacy, the key to progress, is at the

very centre of the *Ujamaa* concept. Every citizen must be able to read, write and count—skills that are essential for awakening a political conscience and stimulating political participation as well as for increasing productivity. Familiarization with the basic workings of society and civic and socio-economic training appear as integrated activities in the literacy process.

The creation of a new society, with the structural changes and changes of mentality that that implies, was also behind the undeniable success of Ethiopia's national literacy campaign. In 1974, that is, before the revolution, 93 per cent of the population was illiterate. At the end of the third stage of the campaign in 1980 the illiteracy rate had fallen to 65 per cent, a spectacular reduction.

In other countries, especially in Africa, literacy action has been conceived and planned as a component part of development programmes. In Mali, literacy as a factor of adaptation to change is an integral part of large-scale operations for the organization and development of agriculture (ground-nut, Ségou rice and fishery programmes). Upper Volta has opted for a literacy programme that caters from the start for village communities involved in specific rural development projects. The hope is that, through this strategy, special interest in literacy will spread.

The examples cited above confirm that the change which a society undergoes is a prerequisite for a successful literacy campaign or programme, especially in those milieux which we have defined as pre-literate or predominantly illiterate. But this change, which we call development or modernization, will only take place to the extent that the population participates actively in it.

The individual or group is both the beneficiary and the ultimate target of every

development action, but he is also the determining factor. However, very few rural dwellers in Africa, Asia and Latin America have completed their primary education. The majority of those who have been lucky enough to go to their village school have attended it for only three or four years. Most Third World farmers are illiterate or semi-literate. They are hardly capable of reading and understanding the directions for use of fertilizers or insecticides. They have scarcely learned the most elementary arithmetic such as the rule of three or the calculation of percentages. How can they keep accounts or calculate the interest they will have to pay on an agricultural credit loan? Their low level of education, starting with illiteracy, is a veritable "counter-development" factor which blocks any real possibility of continuous progress in the agricultural sector from the start. One might say that there is complete incompatibility between this inadequate level of education and development in the rural sector.

This is where what has been called functional literacy training comes in, because it fulfils a function that is related to specific needs and problems. The aim of the functional literacy programme is to equip individuals intellectually and to bring them to a level where the knowledge acquired becomes usable on both the social and economic levels. In fact the objective of the functional literacy programme is to adapt the individual to change and to make him responsible for change. We seem to be faced with a kind of circular causality, the two factors—change and literacy—being interdependent, one determining the other. In reality, people are not made literate, they make themselves literate. Only when illiterates, both men and women, realize that their ignorance of the written word or number is a stumbling-block in their path to greater progress will they become their own most eager pupils.

■ Marcel de Clerck

What next?

A world panorama of back-up materials for new literates

by Adama Ouane

ONE of the basic problems involved in the process of bringing people to literacy is the production, acquisition and proper utilization of pedagogical material. This may be printed matter or material based on the modern communications media (radio, television, audiovisual systems), or it may be traditional (theatre, folklore, various games and similar activities). Some countries have also developed a variety of structures to provide easier access to pedagogical materials (such as libraries, exhibitions, fairs), or other methods of helping the greatest number of people to draw the fullest possible benefit from these materials (listening to programmes in groups, study circles, activity groups).

Printed material can be divided into two categories—textbooks and other reading manuals; and rural newspapers and wall-magazines. The first category is of particular concern to the developing countries. The aim is to prevent regression into illiteracy, to motivate the newly-literate and to inculcate the habit of reading, as well as to produce a sufficient quantity of reading matter on subjects which meet their needs, tastes and interests.

ADAMA OUANE, Malian specialist in linguistics, is currently engaged on research at the Unesco Institute for Education, Hamburg (Fed. Rep. of Germany). Formerly assistant director-general of the national directorate for functional literacy and linguistics at Bamako, he is the author of several studies and articles mainly concerned with the use of national languages in literacy campaigns.



Attractive reading materials must be available for the newly literate if they are to maintain and develop their hard-won skills. In the Ivory Coast, above, the visit of the mobile library or "bibliobus" with its stock of publications in vernacular languages is an exciting event in the life of the community.

The content of this material varies widely. Some reading manuals are graduated and structured to meet the needs of various classes and levels. This is particularly true of countries where literacy programmes have been given a distinctly academic orientation and where links have been established between literacy programmes and out-of-school education and the official education system. This is the case in Cuba and Venezuela. It is also true for the complementary education programme in the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the

part-time schools of the People's Republic of China, two programmes which are in effect parallel education systems designed basically for rural populations, workers and executives of various levels. Their purpose is to provide a second chance of acquiring an education for those who dropped out of the formal school system at an early age.

Complementary reading material is vital to this strategy. In 1980 alone, China produced 4,600 million copies of 21,000 publications for readers in rural areas, but only a small proportion of this

Photo © Almasny, Paris

Photo T. S. Nagarajan-UNICEF

torrent of reading matter was destined for the newly-literate.

The United Republic of Tanzania has produced a series of texts, graduated at four levels of difficulty, for the newly-literate, but these differ from and are independent of the levels established in the formal school system. The aim is to provide manuals of increasing levels of difficulty for some five million people of whom about one million attend post-literacy classes. There is a teacher's guide to go with each type of manual. Traditional oral literature, systematically collected and transcribed, occupies an important place in these reading manuals.

Following the broad lines of its education-for-development strategy, Indonesia has launched a vast "Employment-oriented Learning Programme" and has set up a co-ordinated out-of-school education programme under the aegis of the Community Education Authority. In 1977, the Authority initiated a new, detailed and all-embracing literacy programme. The teaching materials consist of a hundred innovative publications containing basic teaching and information concerning every aspect of daily life and aimed at those who left school early or never had the opportunity of attending school.

In Brazil, the pedagogical material used in the mass literacy campaign *MOBRAL* (*Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização*) is known as "literature on a string", because the manuals used are suspended on strings from the walls of the instruction centres. Most of these manuals, prepared by specialists and put into easily-read form appropriate for new literates by professional writers, deal

with such subjects as agriculture, public health matters and locally-used technologies.

In Mali, the output of post-literacy pedagogical materials is very varied. Manuals are produced jointly by the National Functional Literacy and Applied Linguistics Authority, other development organizations and, where appropriate, certain technical services, including those concerned with public health, agriculture, co-operation and water and forest resources. In these manuals oral tradition and local tales are given pride of place.

Countries differ considerably in the way in which they produce these reading materials. In one group of countries, among them notably the French-speaking countries, they are produced in a rather informal manner with a small number of books being produced on a series of specific subjects. The new literates themselves take part in their production, at times carrying out such technical tasks as making roneo copies. These manuals are not generally intended for use in formal education and they allow of a certain flexibility and independence in the teaching method adopted. In other countries reading materials for the newly-literate form an integral part of carefully developed post-literacy courses. Although the contents allow for individual use, they are clearly intended to be taught, and this is why these manuals are usually accompanied by teachers' guides.

Two other methods of production are widely used in Africa and Asia. They consist of collecting the abundant heritage of traditional oral literature and of writers' workshops which are organized

in a variety of ways, ranging from gatherings of writers to produce texts to more or less formal on-the-job training sessions for editors. Most countries try to seek out, encourage and stimulate individual talent or collective creativity by organizing regular literary competitions for which prizes are awarded. In India, for example, more than 800 works have already been rewarded in this way.

In most multilingual African and Asian countries, where the language used within the family and in normal social life is rarely the same as that used by the administration or in the official education system, achieving literacy, generally in the local language, means not only acquiring a means of communication but also the adoption of new means of expression. These languages often have only recently been given a written form. Becoming literate means making the leap from an oral tradition, with all its specific attributes, to the written word, with all its inherent modes of perception and thought.

It is easy, therefore, to understand the persistent efforts which certain countries make to maintain an economic, social and cultural climate favourable to the use of the written word. The aim is to immerse new literates in an environment in which they must permanently face the challenge of the written word. The provision of written material, however aggressive it may be, is not enough to create this challenge; the newly-literate must be involved in activities of a complexity such that they cannot fall back on memory alone and are obliged to turn to written communication.

Rural newspapers are both an important source of reading material and a means of communication accessible to the newly-literate and their value as a vehicle for the spread of basic knowledge and as an answer to the urgent need for simple reading matter able to reflect the many aspects of foreign and local news has been quickly recognized.

In some countries, such as Upper Volta, Indonesia, Mali and Senegal, newspapers are produced only at national level. Niger, on the other hand, has developed a truly decentralized rural press ranging from the national organ *Gangaa* to regional publications such as *Jine Koy Yan*.

In India, where some 8,000 weekly or monthly newspapers are produced in rural areas for the rural populations, bulletins and monthly publications are produced sporadically for the newly-literate and those with limited reading experience.

Wall-newspapers often meet the need for a community newspaper. In many villages a wall is painted black so that news and information of interest to the villagers can be chalked up. In Mozambique and in Thailand the central blackboard, situated in the main square of the village, black-painted walls or wall-newspapers are used for educative purposes and to inform new literates about international, national and local events. ▶

Below, an Indian health educator uses an illustrated wall-chart with explanatory texts when telling a village mother about the nutritious qualities of leafy vegetables and fruits. Collaboration between writers and specialists in such fields as health, agriculture and women's education is widely encouraged in the production of educational materials for literacy and post-literacy work.



► Printing methods are often rather modest. One method which is catching on is the use of the linograph for printing village newspapers. This method is most widely used in Niger where village newspapers, which form the basis of the rural press, are produced by the new literates themselves. Aided by local literacy instructors they form the editorial committee and undertake every stage in the production process from the manufacture of the necessary materials to the writing of articles.

Libraries also play an important role in literacy campaigns. The distribution of reading materials seems often to be an almost insurmountable problem and the rural library, whether well or poorly stocked, permanently located or mobile, is a vital instrument in post-literacy follow-up. Each of the 2,000 districts of the United Republic of Tanzania has at least one rural library. At present there are 2,781 rural libraries in all out of a planned total of 8,000 to cover all the villages in the country.

Although in India there is widespread interest in village libraries, their importance to the post-literacy strategy varies from State to State. Many libraries fulfil other cultural and social functions in addition to providing reading facilities. They also aid post-literacy follow-up by acting as a meeting place for clubs, discussion groups and radio listening circles.

Many of these libraries are mobile and can be transferred from place to place by bicycle, on horseback or in a librarian's knapsack, by truck or by canoe. But the stock available to these libraries rarely exceeds a thousand books. As well as this shortage of stock there is another drawback; the books available tend to be on "useful" subjects aimed at continuing the learning process or the application of knowledge to the solution of immediate practical problems rather than the epics, novels or other light reading that some inquirers suggest new literates would prefer to read.

However, the real problem is not one of

libraries or the way they function, the quality of the materials or the service given, but the lack of publications in the languages used in literacy campaigns. Many countries have therefore examined the possibilities offered by the use of the modern mass media to promote education and to consolidate the use of the written word, bearing in mind that these media should be used as a complement to and in conjunction with printed matter.

In Cuba a vast programme of post-literacy follow-up, standardization of attainment levels and other links has been initiated to enable the newly-literate emerging from the mass literacy campaigns to become integrated into the country's formal education system. Radio and television have been given the vital task of ensuring the continuing education of workers and peasants and are also being used to raise the pedagogical and methodological levels of thousands of non-professional teachers.

In Venezuela the most important educational television programme, *Fe y Alegría* (Faith and Joy), is conducted by the Catholic Radiophonic Institute. This programme reaches four of the country's largest cities and there are plans to extend it to reach others. It consists of four courses at different levels and is aimed at illiterates and those who have not completed their primary education. Radio programmes have also been integrated into this system of tele-instruction.

In Brazil the MOBRAF literacy movement uses television, radio, films and other modern technologies for its lifelong education programme and other post-literacy follow-up strategies. Among these programmes mention should be made of the Community Health Education Programme, which is broadcast by 300 radio stations in twenty-five States and three Territories, and the Appropriate Technologies Programme, which demonstrates by exhibitions, radio and above all television the way in which various techniques are invented

and applied in order to provide practical, readily available solutions to the daily problems facing the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

Since it is impossible with these new methods of communication to limit reception to an individual or a specific group, such as the newly-literate, some countries are trying to organize the target audiences more effectively by grouping them around receivers that have been given free of charge, for a nominal sum or sold in the normal way to radio clubs and listening and viewing groups. The objective is to prolong, to channel and to enhance the impact of a broadcast by ensuring that it is heard by those whom it most concerns.

In the United Republic of Tanzania 7,000 radio receivers have been distributed free of charge to listening groups. In Mali there are 1,444 organized listening groups, each with its own radio receiver. In Upper Volta radio clubs have been established for educational purposes at literacy centres where collective listening sessions are organized.

In Latin America, and in Brazil, Cuba and Venezuela in particular, classes by radio offer an alternative method of entry into the formal education system thanks to the establishment of levels of equivalence and the award of certificates and diplomas to listeners who have passed examinations in their subjects.

The pedagogical effectiveness of radio and television can only be enhanced by progress now being made in telematics and video-recording. The paths that are being opened up before us offer new opportunities, unequal though these may still be. It must be stressed that if the objective is to create a climate favourable to an interaction between education and practical action, a strategy relating solely to the provision of literacy materials will not be enough. The objective can only be attained by the combined application of several strategies.

■ Adama Ouane

Children wait for the lesson to begin at an open-air school cinema in southern Morocco. Film, radio and TV are being imaginatively used in many countries today to support and supplement more traditional methods of combatting illiteracy.

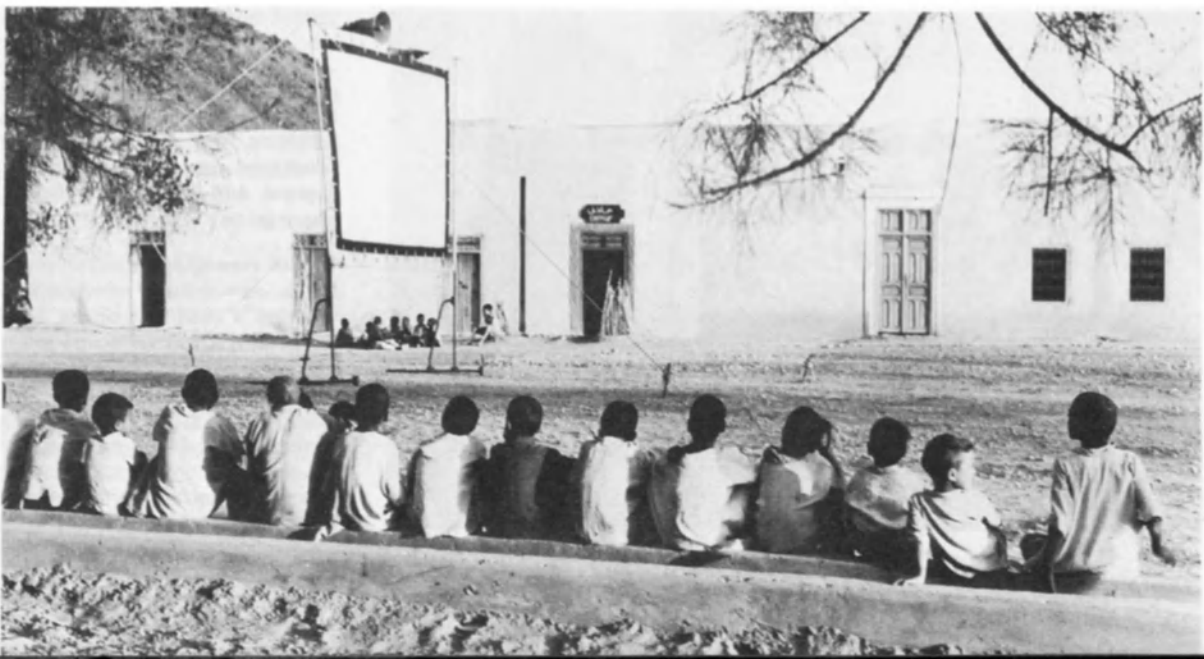


Photo © Charles Henneghien, Marcincelle, Belgium

The political economy of literacy training



This French scientist, one of his country's most brilliant research workers in the field of mechanical physics, is a former agricultural worker. One of many children in a poor peasant family, he started work (right) after leaving primary school. His exceptional intellectual qualities were revealed when he registered for military service and had to pass a series of intelligence tests. He was subsequently enabled to study and catch up on the time he had lost. He became a doctor of science and a professor at the French National Institute of Applied Sciences in Lyons.

by *Herbert Gintis*

IT is well known that the question of literacy training is an economic problem: there are specific per unit costs involved in literacy attainment, and there are equally specific individual benefits, in terms of higher labour productivity and earning capacity, associated with such attainment. What is less often recognized, however, is that the benefits of literacy training are quite as often political as they are economic. This is true in two quite distinct yet complementary ways.

First, literacy must be considered a basic right precisely because it is a virtual prerequisite to political participation in social life. The illiterate population of a country is normally concentrated among social groups and in demographic areas which have been systematically deprived of political resources and access to social power. Historically, literacy has been a prime force in the development of those forms of popular consciousness, social solidarity, and political awareness upon which the effective exercise of political influence depends.

Indeed, it is often an important point for educational planners to understand that op-

position to literacy programmes is quite as likely to emanate from groups opposed to the potential empowerment resulting from their success, as from those opposed to the implementation costs themselves.

Second, the social rewards that induce individuals to acquire literacy and once acquired, to maintain and improve their levels of literacy, are quite as often political as economic. There are many groups and individuals whose conditions of life render the exercise of reading and writing skills of minimal importance for the day-to-day tasks of home and work. Yet for such individuals and groups, literacy remains a fundamental tool of participation in local community, work, and national politics. It follows that in many situations a prerequisite for a successful literacy training programme is the widespread existence of popular representative and participatory democratic forms, within which the exercise of literacy becomes a socially meaningful and rewarding act.

Literacy and popular democracy, then, are to a greater extent than many planners are willing to countenance, two faces of a coin. When individuals are continually call-

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►ed upon to contribute to the making of decisions which affect their lives, and when such decisions depend on the knowledge of social conditions and the opinions of contending parties or interests, the development and exercise of literacy become of paramount importance. When these opportunities are absent, the development of cognitive skill may be of purely abstract interest.

In short, the nature of political life facing individuals and groups becomes a critical ingredient in determining whether literacy programmes will be implemented or, if implemented, will be of long-term success—particularly in situations where on-the-job use of literacy is of less than overwhelming importance. But what of the form of literacy training programmes themselves? Here again, it is all too common to treat the methods of imparting cognitive skills as though they were purely technical issues of pedagogical method. Yet issues of politics and power are always central to the learning process.

The political aspects of literacy training are more likely to be recognized in a progressive society, which is so organized as to be unthreatened by the full development in its citizens of the personal capacities to control their collective destinies, and which does not fear the power and knowledge of a literate citizenry. Thus the first step in the development of effective literacy programmes, I believe, is the weakening of those backward and élitist forces which are threatened by the prospects of popular power.

Effective literacy training, I suggest, requires the rejection of many standard notions in educational theory—notions which have well served élites, but are not well geared to the needs of the many. For instance, education is often treated with the model of the *active teacher* and the *passive learner*. In this active/passive model, skills are seen as passing from the initiator who *controls*, to the receptor, who is *controlled*. As such, educational institutions in general, and literacy training programmes in particular, are systematically exempted from the general criteria of democratic participation. The active/passive model in literacy training often fails, then, for two inter-related reasons connected to the undemocratic nature of the educational process.

First, true learning occurs precisely when individuals acquire a personal capacity by exercising their personal control over their environment. The reduction of the learner—especially the adult learner—to a passive instrument of the teacher, removes from the educational encounter the most effective basis of skill acquisition. Second, the natural reaction of the learner to the lack of power in the educational setting is to oppose the will of the powerful. Thus *not* learning becomes a positive act of self-assertion and the maintenance of personal dignity. The political economy of learning, by contrast, is based on the principle that learning occurs most effectively, and with the greatest positive acceptance on the part of the learners, when the educational environment *empowers* the learners, and engages them in the active exercise of their individual and collective powers.

How, finally, should literacy pro-

grammes be integrated into the social fabric of people's lives? Education (literacy training in particular) is often considered a separate sphere of social life, and hence should be provided in social settings distinct from home, community, and work. This, I believe, is a distinct error. Education is a practice, not a place. Education is that practice whose object is the personal capacities of individuals, and whose project is the full development of these capacities. Like all other social practices, educational practices take place everywhere.

The usual treatment of education is quite otherwise. The most common view of education is that learning takes place in special institutions which prepare people for other sets of social institutions—such as politics and work. But in fact education is the practice involving the production of people.

Where are people “produced”? The answer, I believe, is that people are produced—and hence are educated—in each and every social environment in which they participate. In particular, people are produced in politics, and people are produced in work. Politics does not simply produce leaders and political decisions—it produces educated citizens. The economy does not simply produce goods and services—it produces people. In short, education is a practice which is, whether consciously or unconsciously, whether planned or unplanned, an aspect of democratic political development, and egalitarian economic development.

Ignoring this fundamental point tends to lead educational planners into two errors. The first is to associate education with children, since specialized educational institutions are normally geared to the young. Yet by this association, it is forgotten that education must occur throughout life, and that the economic and political benefits of adult education are quite as significant as those of childhood education. The second is to think that the provision of such adult education programmes as literacy training

must be thought of as co-operating with, but lying essentially outside of the day-to-day institutions which govern politics, community affairs, and economic production.

I would like to suggest that often the most effective means of implementing literacy training and other forms of adult cognitive and occupational training is to integrate such programmes into work-life and community-life. Literacy programmes should be a worker's right in agricultural and industrial production, and provision should be made during the work day for literacy training as part of the worker's job benefits. In addition, employers should be urged to reorganize the division of labour so as to draw upon the literacy skills of workers as these skills manifest themselves and develop, even in situations where the immediate pay-off in higher productivity is not evident. For the long-run benefits to society (and usually to productivity within the industry itself) of such programmes are significant.

In effect, recognizing that education is a practice integrated into the fabric of daily life, rather than being a specialized service provided to individuals at specific points in their lives, radically changes our notion of the relationship of literacy training to post-literacy programmes and vocational training. One of the most vexing problems for educational policy makers has been that of the maintenance of literacy in the years that follow the completion of successful literacy training. I have already noted that, in the absence of the proper mix of concrete economic and political incentives, the maintenance of literacy cannot be expected. I wish merely to add that when literacy and vocational training are integrated into community and work, the importance of “post-literacy” programmes recedes dramatically. For the process of literacy becomes a continuous part of the lives of individuals, and in addition acquires a momentum by virtue of the fact that learners themselves are taking the initiative in the control of their own education.

■ Herbert Gintis

“Literacy programmes should be a worker's right in agricultural and industrial production, and provision should be made during the work day for literacy training as part of the worker's job benefits.” Below, a tea plantation in Cameroon.



Photo M. Huet © Hoa-Qui, Paris

Reports from around the world



WHAT is actually being done to combat illiteracy? We present below a number of specific examples, together with relevant statistics, concerning the present state and future prospects of literacy activities in major regions of the world. The information provided comes either from communications addressed directly to the Unesco Courier or from documents available in the Unesco Secretariat. The text is illustrated by literacy campaign posters from each region (above, poster from Suriname). In boxes on double page overleaf three newly literate adults from Canada, Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania tell how their lives were changed when they learned to read and write.

► **Ethiopia:** The literacy campaign launched in 1976 is still being vigorously pursued. With the encouragement of the National Co-ordinating Committee, the campaign now involves all the people's organizations of the country, including agricultural workers' associations, citizens' associations (*Kebeles*), as well as 984,700 volunteer literacy workers (teachers, students and other volunteers). 14.1 million of the country's 22 million inhabitants over the age of 10 have followed literacy courses; 8.35 million (59 per cent) of the 12.8 million taking the final test have reached the required standard, with the result that the literacy rate has now been raised to an estimated 90 per cent and 49 per cent for the urban and rural populations respectively (in 1974, only 7 per cent of all Ethiopians were able to read and write). It should also be pointed out that the literacy campaign has been carried out in the 15 major languages of the country (out of a total of 80) which are spoken by 90 per cent of the population.

The Central African Republic: Under difficult conditions and on a more limited scale, a literacy campaign has been launched for the rural population (more specifically, for 3,650 cotton-workers between the ages of 15 and 35

enrolled in 61 literacy centres and taught by 122 literacy workers). An interesting feature of this campaign is that post-literacy stimulation to continue reading is provided in the special supplements for the newly literate, contained in the newspapers, *Linga* and *Nzoni Kode*.

Lesotho: Use of the rural press is a feature of post-literacy work in Lesotho, with a special supplement in the newspaper, *Moithuti*. Before the literacy campaign, out of a population of 1.2 million, about 55 per cent were literate. Today, after six years of effort, 6,000 illiterate and 20,000 semi-literate persons have been helped to literacy. This literacy campaign also reached 600 herdboys and young girls as well as miners from Lesotho working in South Africa and the inmates of the country's prisons. In collaboration

Now I feel great and self-confident...

NDUGU Rukia Okashi is a 53-year old farmer living in Arusha, Tanzania. She grows maize, beans and vegetables, has seven children and became literate about ten years ago. She says :

There is a great difference in my present situation when compared with the old days. A lot of changes have taken place. When I was required to sign various papers and documents I could only use the thumb print and one never knew what exactly one was signing. Consequently, you could sometimes suffer injustices and exploitation. Now that I am literate no one can ask me to sign just blindly. I first have to ask what the whole business is all about, I read the papers myself, and it is only after I am satisfied that I agree to sign. If I don't agree with the contents of the documents, I just don't sign. Whereas before one could never refuse to sign a document: you were just asked to put your thumb print...

Literacy has helped me in many other ways. Through literacy I now know the nutrient values of various foods—those which build the body, those which help us to prevent some diseases, and so on. I know what a balanced diet is.

Formerly, when one walked through the streets one couldn't read any signs. You may come across a "danger" signboard but you continue to walk ahead until someone shouts, "Mama, mama, mama, stop!" But these days, I can read all the sign-posts such as "Don't pass here, Don't walk on the grass". In travelling also, I used to ask the driver to let me get down at a certain place, but sometimes the driver would take you much further beyond your destination. If such an incident occurs now, I shout and protest.

So now I feel great and self-confident. I have the ability to refuse or disagree whereas formerly I easily became a victim of great injustices because I was illiterate. ■

(Source: *Convergence*, International Council for Adult Education, Toronto, Canada, Vol. X N° 3, 1977).



Poster from the Republic of Cape Verde

with the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre, a multi-media literacy training programme uses the facilities offered by radio, the rural press and apprenticeship centres for the rural and migrant populations. Lesotho's literacy campaign has also had a certain impact, thanks to similarities of language, in Botswana and Swaziland.

Mali: Concern with Post-literacy follow-up—the stage which succeeds acquisition of the ability to read and write—is ensured in Mali by publication of the monthly newspaper *Kibaru* ("The News"), with a circulation of 20,000.

United Republic of Tanzania: 8 rural newspapers, with a total circulation of 450,000, both inform and teach the newly-literate population; the best known of these, *Elimu Haina Mwisno* ("Education Never Stops") has a circulation of 100,000. Tanzania's large-scale literacy campaign has, in the space of a few years, made it possible to reduce the adult illiteracy rate from 75 per cent to 21 per cent. In addi-

When you can't read or write you are poor...

AT the age of thirty, Janice Taylor, of Pembroke, Canada, was totally illiterate. She had not continued her studies beyond the fifth year because of adaptation problems and, unable to read or write, had found herself virtually cut off from normal social life.

One day she heard talk in her neighbourhood of ALSO, an organization established to help illiterates.

At first I found it all very difficult, but I was determined to continue because I wanted to go to college and learn a trade. When you can't read or write, you can't get work, you are poor, you can't take part in many activities and sometimes you don't even understand what people are saying to you. You are not aware of what is going on around you.

Since last May, Janice has been the proud possessor of a diploma of the Department of Trade and Technology's Algonquin College and now specializes in the repair of small mechanical and electrical equipment such as typewriters, radios and light fittings.

When I started taking the course I was embarrassed about my age and I was afraid that people would laugh at me. I soon found that everybody else felt the same. ■

(Source: Article by France Pilon in *Le Droit*, Ottawa, 9 September 1983).

tion to the newspapers mentioned above, a series of interconnected and co-ordinated activities maintain and extend the rudimentary skills in reading, writing and arithmetic of the newly literate, and encourage the application of these skills to problems encountered daily in personal and community life. There are some 3,200 rural libraries, with an average of 400 books each. Between 1976 and 1982, 52 Folk Development Colleges, functioning in a unique manner, enabled 38,000 students to follow development-oriented training courses.

Furthermore, special educational radio programmes have reached an audience of millions, organized in listening groups, with instruction in health, nutrition and other subjects. Lastly, correspondence courses designed particularly for adults and future teachers, provide out-of-school education at the primary and secondary levels.

Angola: The entire population has been mobilized by an efficiently organized campaign making use of radio, television and the press and run essentially by volunteer teachers, especially young people. Teaching materials are produced in six national languages as well as Portuguese.

The Syrian Arab Republic: In a particularly vigorous literacy campaign launched in 1958, 10,766 courses have been provided; 263,318 pupils have been enrolled; 130,000 have completed the course. A particularly noteworthy achievement has been the mobilization as literacy workers of a large number of citizens aged 18 or over, who have themselves already received an education.

Kuwait: Before the launching of the literacy campaign in 1981, 32 per cent of the male population and 52 per cent of the female population was illiterate; since then, 17,076 pupils have been taught to read and write. Teaching, organized in eight-month courses and provided in 66 literacy centres, is particularly intensive consisting of three hours of classes each day, on five days per week. There is no shortage of teaching materials, and use is also made of wall-newspapers, slides and films.

The Yemen Arab Republic: In 1975, 74 per cent of the male and 97 per cent of the female population were illiterate. A recently launched literacy campaign aims to

teach some 700,000 people to read and write between 1982 and 1986.

Iraq: The national campaign for compulsory literacy launched in 1978, constitutes a significant effort in the struggle to eliminate illiteracy, and at the same time is particularly concerned with the provision of the education and training that will enable the newly literate to play an active part in national development.

Brazil: A mass literacy campaign, the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetizaçã* (MOBRAL), was launched as long ago as 1967. The campaign is conducted through 1,141 literacy centres, and uses the facilities offered by 1,157 newspapers, 650 radio programmes and 1,414 public address systems. In association with the Programme for Functional Literacy (PAF), MOBRAL has recently been extended to provide cultural programmes, vocational training and community health education as well as literacy teaching. Self-instruction constitutes an interesting element of this latest enterprise; pupils who have already learnt to read and write are taught to continue the learning process on their own.

Ecuador: Significant progress has been made in the field of literacy training. In 1974, there were 965,000 illiterates in the country. Since then, 536,000 have been taught to read and write. The number of literacy centres is a measure of the scale of the undertaking—courses are provided in 7,562 schools and also in premises built by the participants, in clubs, community centres and even in private homes.

Suriname: A campaign entitled "Alfa 84", to be carried out between August 1984 and March 1985, aims to reduce to a negligible figure the illiteracy rate of 35 per cent (1978) in the 15 to 59 age range, i.e. 60,000 illiterates out of a total population of 360,000. Today's illiterates include a con- ▶

It is like being reborn...

BIRKE is a 27-year-old woman from Sidamo province, Ethiopia, who has just completed a six-month literacy programme. She tells her own story:

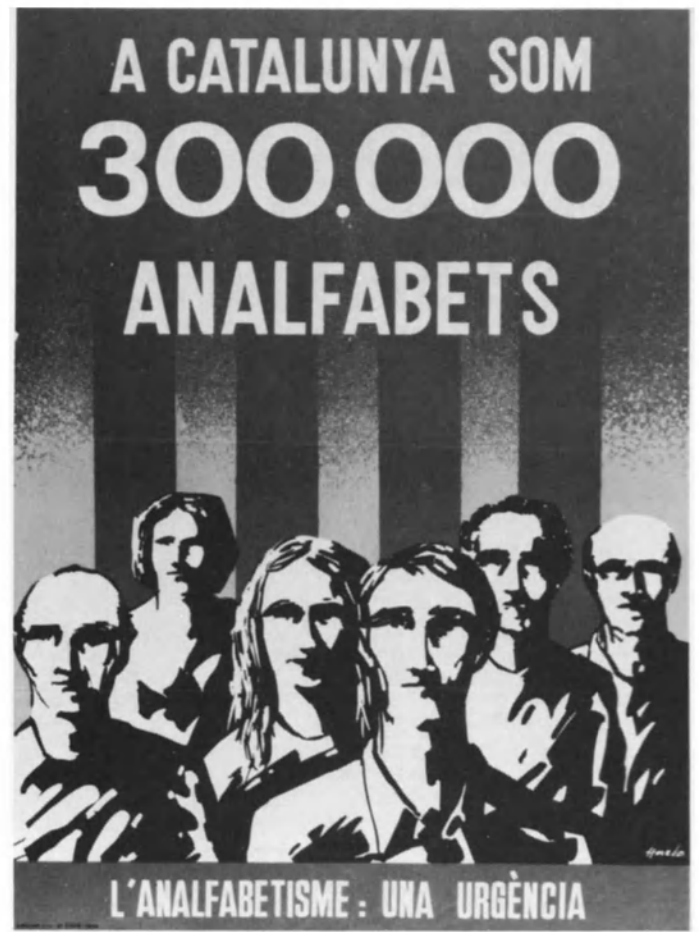
The very idea of sending a girl to school was formerly considered immoral in our society. If there was any opportunity at all for education, it was always the boys who were given this privilege. A girl was supposed to stay at home until the day of her marriage. And once married—not to the man of her choice, but to the one who promised the biggest amount of miné (dowry)—her chances of going to school became absolutely inexistent. In fact in this new phase of her life she had to face many other injustices and hardships. Every day she would have to go to the river to fetch water, collect wood for the fire and prepare the food; she looked after the cattle and the household, and that was how she would live for the rest of her life.

But times have changed. A small local reading centre was set up in our village and those who had already learnt to read would read out to the others what was in the newspapers. When my turn came to attend a literacy class I studied hard and in six months I was able to read and write. Today whenever I get newspapers I enjoy reading them. I have become aware of things. It is like being reborn or like a blind man who has regained his sight. I never thought this would happen in my lifetime. ■

(Source: *Communication Media and Education for Development—The Case of Ethiopia*, by Fikre Mariam Tsehail)

► siderable number of former primary school pupils who abandoned their studies prematurely. A particular problem is posed by the fact that a total of 20 mother tongues are spoken by the population. Only 40 per cent of the population, most of whom are already able to read and write; master the official language, Suriname Dutch. The organizers have calculated that it will be necessary to mobilize some 22,000 literacy workers, including volunteers from women's associations and youth organizations, trade unions, agricultural workers' associations and religious institutions as well as professional teachers during "Alfa 84". The Government estimates that the overall cost of this campaign will amount to some US \$ 15,400,000, half of which, it is hoped, will be provided through international co-operation.

The Dominican Republic: Thanks in part to assistance



Posters from Catalonia (above), the United Arab Emirates (below) and Bangladesh (left).



from Unesco, the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Bank, significant progress has been made in a country with a million illiterates aged 15 or over. Since the literacy campaign was launched in 1982, 79,833 illiterates have been taught to read and write in 12,523 basic education centres by 31,331 volunteer workers using 1,777,703 teaching manuals and other types of educational material.

Peru: In 1981, Peru had more than 1,700,000 illiterates, or 17.4 per cent of the population over the age of 15. A total of 499,000 adults have since been taught to read and write, or are currently receiving literacy training. A special effort has been made to distribute the necessary basic materials free of charge: these include 274,000 primers and the same numbers of writing manuals, 200,000 sets of instruction cards and copies of an elementary arithmetic textbook – not to mention 2,000 oil lamps! A strategy for post-literacy training is being implemented with the collaboration of those responsible for other branches of education, in the context of cultural projects and local or regional programmes of vocational or continuing education.

Nicaragua: Launched in 1979, the literacy teaching campaign has reduced the illiteracy rate from 50 to 13 per cent. Based on people's education collectives and community education groups, the campaign recruited and trained 120,000 volunteer teachers who, in the space of five months, taught more than 400,000 Nicaraguans to read and write. Students in secondary schools are obliged by law to spend six months participating as teachers in the adult education programme.

Functional illiteracy has by no means disappeared in all the industrialized countries of the world.

Canada: 856,060 Canadians (5.5 per cent of the population aged 15 or over) have failed to complete their primary education and may be considered virtually illiterate. There are considerable variations in the illiteracy rate in the different provinces: 7.5 per cent in Quebec, 11.9 per cent in



Poster from Turkey

Newfoundland and as much as 23.3 per cent in the Northwest Territories. Although more than 70 million dollars were spent on literacy teaching between 1979 and 1980, the scale of the problem has only recently become fully apparent, as was seen in the importance attached to the celebration of International Literacy Day on 8 September 1983, in Ottawa (see back cover). A special feature of literacy work in Canada is that it is carried out not only by the Department of the Ministry of Education responsible for basic education for adults, but also by volunteer services (in Quebec) and by a hundred or so officially-sponsored or private bodies.

Poland: During the early post-war years, the illiteracy rate was very high, but it was considerably reduced as a result of the literacy and school enrolment campaign launched by the Government in 1951. In 1981, 2.7 million Poles over the age of 15 (10 per cent of this age group) had not completed the full course of basic education. During the school year 1982-1983, however, only 0.34 per cent of children of school age were not actually enrolled.

Turkey: Although it was launched comparatively recently (1981), the national literacy campaign has already produced substantial results—3,156,799 new literates. These include a large number of women, agricultural workers and inhabitants of shanty-towns and destitute villages. Before the campaign was launched 69 per cent of the population over the age of 6 was literate; today the figure has risen to 74.8 per cent. For women the figure has risen from 53.8 per cent to 61.2 per cent. Many of these new literates have continued their studies to the level of the adult primary education certificate. Turkey hopes to eliminate illiteracy entirely by 1995.

India: As might be expected in such a large country, literacy activities have long been extremely decentralized. Between 1961 and 1972, the movement for the development of the villages of Maharashtra (*Gram Shikshan Mohin*) completely eradicated adult illiteracy in 36,693 villages, teaching almost 10 million adults, more than half of them women, to read and write. The National Federation of Indian Women has opened 1,500 literacy centres in impoverished urban and rural areas in nine States. The Social Service League of Bengal has trained 8,700 instructors who, between 1961 and 1974, in 320 sessions, taught 105,000 Indians to read and write. In 1975, the Adult External Education Directorate of the Federal Ministry of Education and Social Affairs launched a literacy programme for 300,000 illiterates. Lastly, in 1978, the Federal Government launched a large-scale Five-Year Adult Education Programme covering 22 States and designed to provide literacy teaching for 100 million young people and adults between the ages of 15 and 35, special attention being paid to women in rural areas, certain castes and tribes and the most disadvantaged classes of the urban and rural populations.

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: In 1945, when the literacy campaign was launched, the illiteracy rate in a population of 20 million was 95 per cent. Popular enthusiasm was such that during the first year 2.5 million people were taught to read and write, and a further 10 million in the nine years which followed. By 1958, virtually the entire population between the ages of 12 and 50 was literate. In the southern part of the country, the 4 million illiterates remaining in 1975 had been taught to read and write by 1977. Today, efforts are being made to eliminate illiteracy in the ethnic minorities, and to develop a comprehensive system of complementary education.

China: The past 32 years have seen the transition to literacy of 128 million people aged between 12 and 40, in a country where, in 1949, 80 per cent of the population was illiterate. Today 90 per cent of the country's workers and miners have attained an educational level equivalent to that of pupils who have completed their primary school education. It is estimated that only some 5 to 7 per cent of the people in this group remain illiterate. In the rural areas, 70 per cent of the younger generation of agricultural workers have acquired basic reading and writing skills. In order to maintain and perfect these skills, the local authorities provide workers and peasants with secondary education outside working hours.

Thailand: In 1981, some 14.5 per cent of the population aged over 10 was illiterate, including a large proportion of former primary school pupils who had completed four years of education, but subsequently relapsed into illiteracy. In the Fifth National Social and Economic Development Plan, launched in 1982, the Government set as a target, the reduction of the illiteracy rate to 10 per cent by 1986, by which time, it is hoped, primary education will have become universal. In addition, six specially-conceived extracurricular literacy programmes are currently being implemented with the collaboration of volunteer teachers, students from teacher training institutions and Buddhist monks. Several of these programmes are designed for the country's larger minority groups. ■

Illiteracy in the 'Fourth World'

Rich countries become aware
of a disturbing trend

by *Ali Hamadache*

IT would be a mistake to assume that illiteracy is confined to the Third World. Many countries which have provided universal education for generations are today finding to their astonishment that they are having to face a problem which they thought they had eliminated but which is spreading at an alarming rate, affecting even those countries which for decades have enjoyed a high level of material prosperity.

The predicament of illiterates in industrialized countries is doubtless more difficult than it is in the Third World and sometimes assumes dramatic proportions. A North American or Scandinavian adult who cannot write properly will suffer more intensely from isolation than someone similarly handicapped in a country where the illiteracy rate is high. In some Third World countries, moreover, a rich community life and an oral tradition develop other ways of exercising the memory and organizing thought through a different system of symbols, and this is a source of support for the illiterate person.

In a society that is economically and technologically advanced, where written communication predominates and where the printed word, in particular, is ubiquitous, the person who is not conversant with the fundamental technical skills of reading, writing and arithmetic inevitably finds himself in a position of inferiority in a number of everyday situations: in shops, public transport, at the bank and the post office, in the exercise of civil rights and duties, and even in access to employment. An illiterate unemployed person will even avoid applying for work at an employment agency because he is ashamed of his inability to complete the necessary forms. An illiterate worker will find it difficult to play an active part in trade union activities.

Illiterates are also handicapped when confronted with the complexities of life in industrially developed countries. Since they cannot read street signs, the names of underground stations, or bus and tram destinations, they have difficulty in finding their bearings and getting around in a city. They cannot compare labels in a big store; they cannot calculate the price of the foodstuffs at the grocer's or the butcher's. Having a child admitted to hospital, completing a child allowance form and other administrative formalities—all dealings with the authorities, school and the law, in fact—represent insurmountable obstacles to the illiterate.

The illiterate does not enjoy the respect of the society in which

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Photo © François Koffler, Paris



Photo ILO, Geneva



Although it is most widespread in the Third World, illiteracy is also a growing problem in some of the world's richest countries where it is rampant among the underprivileged sectors of society which have been called the "Fourth World" and include residents of dilapidated inner-city districts, migrant workers and their families, and some low-income rural populations.

he lives nor even that of his family. Children, who cannot be helped with their school work by illiterate parents, will eventually look down on them and even disobey them. Many illiterates feel a sense of shame that often makes them wish to hide from others the fact that they do not know how to read and write; this shame paralyzes them when they are presented with an opportunity to learn to read and write. Sometimes the intelligence of illiterate persons ceases to be used, developed and kept alert; and the introduction of an ever wider array of modern technology introduces new discrimination against illiterates.

In the rich as well as the less affluent countries, illiteracy and poverty are linked in such a way that each condition is sometimes a cause, sometimes an effect, of the other. Illiteracy is closely related to a number of factors that influence one another, including low or non-existent income, poor-quality education or insufficient time in school, poverty of cultural environment, poor health, and insalubrious living conditions. It is particularly widespread among

those who are now referred to as the "Fourth World", that is the most underprivileged categories of society, especially the poor living in marginal city districts, or on the outskirts of cities and in run-down areas, migrant workers and their families and certain minorities or underprivileged groups. This category of the population mainly comprises those who are out of work, occasional workers, workers confined to jobs that require few or no qualifications, people living on social security, some rural populations whose standard of living is particularly low, and where the child's contribution to the family budget is sometimes more important than its regular schooling... in short, all those who are at the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

Illiterate persons are over-represented among the unemployed since, although a high level of education is not a guarantee of employment in the present economic climate, it is nevertheless a prerequisite for entry into a secure and well-paid profession. They are also over-represented among prisoners, who suffer the consequences of illiteracy acutely because writing is for them an important means of communication with the outside world.

Most industrialized countries today admit more or less explicitly that part of their adult population is illiterate. But even where the existence of the problem is acknowledged very few studies have been carried out with the appropriate means to estimate its extent, and fewer still to analyse its causes.

The problem of illiteracy in industrialized countries is complicated by the "qualitative" aspect, mainly in reversion to il-



Photo H.W. Silvester © Rapho, Paris

Comparing labels and prices in the supermarket is but one of many everyday activities in the urban industrialized world which require mastery of the written and printed word.

► literacy and in functional illiteracy which are difficult to evaluate statistically by census alone. However, neither the absence of statistical data on illiteracy nor a refusal to acknowledge its existence can make the problem disappear.

Many industrialized countries which instituted compulsory education long ago and which therefore consider the problem solved have removed the question concerning illiteracy from their census forms. But even where a question on illiteracy still features on a census form, it is not always easy to obtain reliable answers since most illiterates try to conceal their deficiency for psychological reasons as well as for practical considerations connected with their employment prospects. "To be without work is hard, but to be without work and not to know how to read and write is terrible and shameful", said Mr. H., of Rastadt, in the Federal Republic of Germany.

With a view to standardizing educational statistics at an international level, a recommendation of the tenth session of Unesco's General Conference defined as illiterate any person "unable to read, write and understand a short, simple statement of facts relating to his daily life". In 1978 this recommendation was revised with the following significant specification: "A person should be considered 'functionally illiterate' who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community, and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development."

Nevertheless, the criteria of functionality differ widely from one country to another. In one place it is enough to be able to read a set of instructions or a poster; in another, anyone who cannot complete a complicated questionnaire or assimilate written instructions of a fairly technical nature is considered illiterate. Somewhere else, a person who has not completed five or even nine years of elementary education is considered illiterate.

Given the different definitions of illiteracy in the countries under review and the standards required by each society, figures can vary substantially.

The estimates made by the Unesco Office of Statistics and updated in July 1982 using the latest available official surveys are based on the number of people who admit to being illiterate. According to these estimates, in the industrialized countries (Europe [including the Soviet Union], the USA, Canada, Japan, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand) in 1980 2.5 per cent of the adult population aged fifteen and over, some 22.5 million people, can be considered illiterate. It must be pointed out that these are mainly older people, since only 3 per cent of them are in the 15-19 age group, 20 per cent in the 20-44 age group and the vast majority—77



In the Soviet Union the drive against illiteracy was one of the priority tasks of the new régime after the Revolution of 1917. "Woman! Learn to read and write!" runs the top caption of this poster dating from 1923. Lower caption reads: "Oh, little mother, if you were literate you could help me!"

per cent—are 45 and over. It is also clear that the quantitative aspect of illiteracy varies considerably from one country to another: a clear divide separates one group of countries, most of which are in the Mediterranean basin, from the others. Southern Europe has an overall illiteracy rate of 8.1 per cent, the rates in individual countries varying from 4 to 20 per cent.

Another significant fact is that, in most countries, the rates of illiteracy among women are particularly high, often double and in some cases triple the rate of illiteracy among men.

It is also certain that these estimates do not convey the full extent of the problem, since they omit those who have reverted to il-

literacy: those who, through insufficient education or because they did not go beyond the minimum level determined by the society concerned, have certainly learned the basics of reading and writing but have lost them either partly or totally because they have not used them in their everyday life.

Functional illiteracy covers a variety of situations that are defined by the economic, technological and cultural context of each society and the level of basic knowledge each society requires. In the United Kingdom, for example, the definition adopted by the British Association of Settlements (BAS), which classes as illiteracy a level below the standard of a nine-year-old child, revealed in 1979 that there were two million illiterates. In the English-speaking part of Canada, the Canadian Association for Adult Education defined functional illiteracy as "A level of instruction equal or inferior to eight years of schooling", while in Québec the definition is based on less than five years. A study published by the Canadian National Commission for Unesco in 1983 registered 5.5 per cent of Cana-



Photo ILO, Geneva

"All I remember of school is that everyone used to jeer at my father when he came to fetch me", said a boy interviewed during a recent survey on "Illiteracy and Poverty in the Industrialized Countries" carried out, with Unesco support, by the international movement *ATD Quart Monde*. His words echo the widespread sense of isolation and the family tensions which accompany adult illiteracy in the industrialized world.

dians (850,000 people) as having less than five years' schooling and as many as 28.4 per cent (4,400,000 people) with less than nine years' schooling, and with a level of education that was considered inferior to that required for adaptation to the complexity of industrialized society. In Poland, after the literacy and education campaign launched by the government in 1951 to reduce the high rate of illiteracy, there were still, in 1981, 2.7 million Poles of 15 and over who had not had a complete basic education.

In the USA in 1970, a study published by the Louis Harris Poll and financed by the National Reading Centre showed that 18.5 million Americans aged sixteen and over were functionally illiterate; the criteria used included ability to read a newspaper and answer questions on its contents, to use a telephone directory, to complete correctly various forms (applications for employment, social security, a bank account, etc.), to write a cheque, and under-

stand a bus timetable. A comparable study made by the University of Texas from 1971 until 1976 used similar criteria, with an emphasis on everyday life: tasks such as calculating a car's fuel consumption, giving the correct change and understanding the deductions from a pay slip. The survey concluded that illiteracy among English-speaking Americans was in the region of 15-20 per cent. With 23 million people classified as functionally illiterate, it caught the attention of the media and the American public. According to the White House press service, the figure is increasing by 2.3 million annually.

In France no survey has been conducted nationally, but some enquiries have been carried out in recent years among sub-proletarian groups. In the Essonne *département* outside Paris, for example, a survey carried out in 1976 by the Departmental Union of Family Associations and covering 6,000 families with which the authorities were in regular contact showed that 47 per cent of the men and 51 per cent of the women were either illiterate or barely able to read and write. An international social service organization, *Aide à toute détresse Quart Monde*, has studied a sample of seventy-eight sub-proletarian provincial families: 27 per cent of the men and 30 per cent of the women were classified as illiterate.

Another study carried out by *Aide à toute détresse Quart Monde* and published by the European Commission revealed the existence of illiteracy in certain urban areas of Belgium and Luxembourg: 5 per cent of Belgians in Liège and 5 per cent of the population of Luxembourg, with 20 per cent illiteracy among the immigrants in both cities. In Belgium the only reliable data are those collected by the army during recruitment: in 1979 0.4 per cent could neither read nor write and 15 per cent were unable to complete correctly an application for leave. In this category in France, 0.7-0.9 per cent of conscripts can be considered as illiterate; 10-20 per cent in Denmark and Sweden are totally or partially illiterate. Within a given country the data obviously vary considerably from place to place, the poorest areas being the worst affected. An extreme example is that of two regions in Greece with different levels of economic development: Athens has an illiteracy rate of 7.6 per cent, and Thrace one of 27.4 per cent. Spain affords another example: in the Burgos region 2.5 per cent of adults are illiterate and in the Granada area, 13.5 per cent (1975 census). In the USA, 40 per cent of functionally illiterate adults belong to the sector of the population whose income is less than \$5,000, whereas only 8 per cent earn \$15,000 or more (University of Texas survey). In France, statistics published in 1981 show that at the beginning of secondary education, after five years of schooling, 55 per cent of the children of workers have already repeated at least one class while only 15 per cent of the children of people in higher management or in the professions are in the same situation.

The causes of relapse into illiteracy are various. Unfavourable environmental conditions produce situations which do not foster, and even discourage, written communication in sectors of the population. School is often blamed for failing to cultivate either the taste for reading which makes reading a habit or the practice of writing.

Other, admittedly less numerous, studies have also blamed the tendency to watch a great deal of television, to the detriment of the reading habit.

Few industrialized countries have a comprehensive literacy education policy for their indigenous population and/or immigrant workers; and only a few have set up the coherent organization required for co-ordination of the necessary activities and resources.

The solution of this problem calls for political determination which, in spite of mounting concern about the issue, has generally been absent until now. Most programmes, whatever their scale, have been launched by private organizations. In some cases they are nationwide, but often they are local in scope and do not always enjoy official backing. The authorities would give higher priority to the struggle against illiteracy if they were convinced of its importance. This presupposes more effective identification of illiterates and their environment, as well as a fuller understanding of the causes of different forms of illiteracy—total illiteracy, recurrent illiteracy, functional illiteracy, or even "technological" illiteracy—in certain sectors of the population. Finally, it calls for political decisions in the form of legislative, administrative and educational measures and the mobilization of material, financial and human resources.

Children in nomansland

The dilemma of second-generation immigrants



Some countries are trying hard to put an end to the cultural nomansland in which many second-generation immigrants live. Above, in a school at Oullins near Lyons (France) young musicians take part in a creativity session held during a series of encounters with art and artists organized in the town's schools in 1983. In school shown here, 97 per cent of the pupils are the children of immigrants.

Photo © Populart, Oullins, France



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"What is needed is to ensure that society regards the child of an immigrant as a person and not as the fruit of an economic policy. He is, indeed, a person, with his own capacities and gifts, who has a right to education and training, just as he has a right to be different."

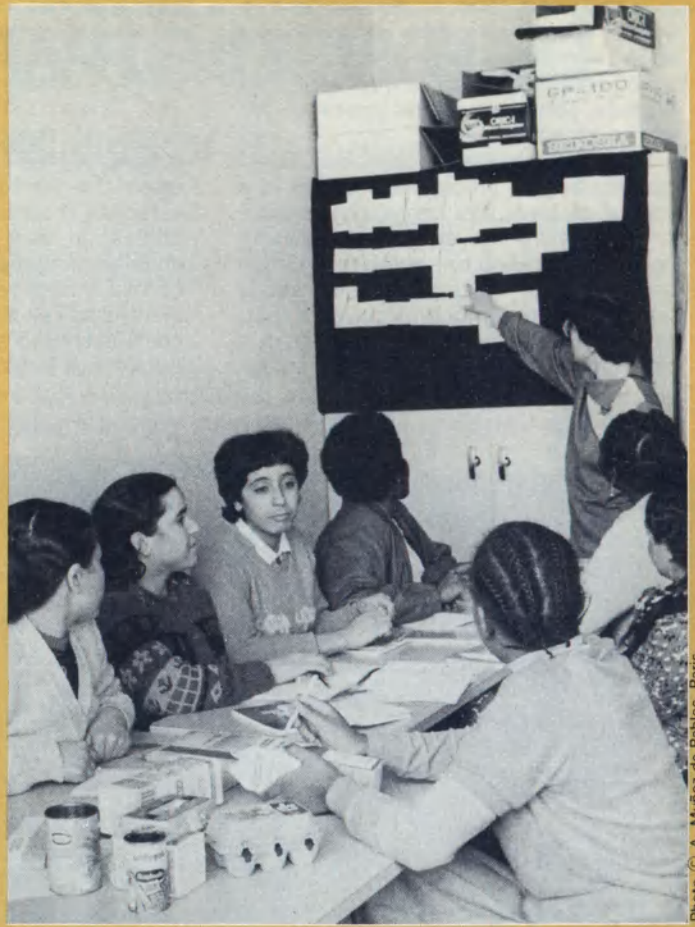


Photo © A. Muñoz de Pablos, Paris

"The illiterate are excluded because they cannot read, but at the same time they cannot read because they are excluded", says a recent French Government report on "The Illiterate in France". Above, a literacy lesson in Paris.

by Sonia Abadir Ramzi

CERTAIN European countries count amongst their populations today a very large number of immigrants from a variety of countries and cultures. (In the case of the Federal Republic of Germany and France, they represent 7 per cent and 8 per cent of the population, respectively). This means that the most diverse cultures are destined to co-exist permanently in the host country. This necessary and unavoidable co-existence gives rise to conflicts if the groups concerned continue to ignore, or even to oppose, one another.

According to statistics, 85 per cent of immigrants belong to the working class, and their working conditions are ex-

SONIA ABADIR RAMZI, of Egypt, has taught at the University of Algiers. She is the author of a book entitled *La Femme Arabe au Maghreb et au Machrek* (at press) and has collaborated on a collective work, *La Femme et la Politique*, to be published by Unesco.

tremely hard. A large majority of them are illiterate. To this major handicap must be added the effect of being removed from their traditional cultural milieu, unhealthy living conditions (75 per cent of the insanitary dwellings in France are occupied by immigrants), precarious economic conditions and permanent legal insecurity. Immigrants are confronted with an industrial civilization which is interested in them only as "productive" individuals, denies their right to be different and ignores their cultural potentialities. Consequently immigrants and their children live on the fringe of social and civic life. Nevertheless, second generation "immigrants" have never emigrated from anywhere!

Some host countries give immigrants the chance to become citizens after a certain period of residence, others give them no security of long-term residence and maintain them in a permanently uncertain, temporary legal situation. This situation has repercussions on the second generation. In five European countries (Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden and Switzerland), 3,800,000 persons under 25 have not formally acquired the

citizenship of the host country.

The marginalization, not to say rejection, of immigrants is due to racial or xenophobic prejudice, often transmitted via the media, which belittles the cultures of people from formerly colonized countries. Because of a cultural heritage shared in common with the host countries, this problem is, relatively speaking, less manifest in the case of Italian, Portuguese and Spanish immigrants.

Immigrants—especially those of Islamic origin—are cut off from their roots without for all that succeeding in acquiring the cultural identity of the host country. Consequently they live in a cultural no man's land. Whereas adult immigrants, whose personalities have already been formed by a set of values, moral codes, customs, myths and symbols, can to a certain degree resist the "dangers" of their new situation, second-generation immigrants cannot escape exposure to the effects of a double sub-culture. The result is that immigrants constitute an anxious, disturbed population. The initial insecurity and inequalities lead to a loss of interest in acquiring literacy. The consequence of this ▶

► is a structural form of illiteracy and illiteracy due to revulsion, both amongst adult immigrants and their children, which places them at a disadvantage as regards access to employment or job advancement.

Whatever the circumstances, imparting literacy to immigrant workers is a special problem. Not only are the majority of these workers and their families incapable of reading or writing their native language, but making them literate is rendered more difficult by the fact that, at the same time, they have to learn a new language. So, belonging to under-

stance, action has been conducted for the past six years under the auspices of the European Community. Its aim is to improve collaboration between native and foreign teachers. Efforts are not limited to teaching the language and culture of origin. The regular teachers meet the foreign ones and gradually establish the programme of school activities. In very many cases, this has enabled immigrant children to reach the normal level of education. But the experiment is still on a limited scale; it has not been extended to Belgium as a whole (which has between 10 and 16 per cent

but, despite the Ministry of Education circular of 3 April 1975 providing for an increase in the number of such courses, there were only 2,510 integrated courses in the 1979-1980 school year, which were attended by 33,600 pupils out of the 400,791 foreign pupils in primary schools. The agreement of 1 December 1981 between France and Algeria provides for the inclusion of integrated Arab language and civilization courses in elementary schools, within the official French school time-tables. At the secondary level, Algerian students may choose their language of origin as a first or second foreign language. The number of Algerian teachers, at present 150, will be doubled.

Education policies affecting children of immigrants in the Federal Republic of Germany vary from State to State. In North Rhineland, for instance, they are given complementary education in their native tongue. Elsewhere they are taken into preparatory classes for two, four or even six years.

In Luxemburg, a bilingual country, reception classes are aimed at bringing foreign pupils up to an acceptable level in French and German.

In Switzerland, the reception classes introduced in the sixties have been replaced by support programmes.

In the United Kingdom, a law dating from 1966 authorizes local authorities in whose areas immigrants account for more than 2 per cent of the population to seek reimbursement of 75 per cent of the cost of salaries for teachers and social workers responsible for the reception of immigrants. The National Association for Multi-cultural Education leads the campaign to adapt the British education system to the presence of immigrants.

It is, perhaps, in Sweden that the biggest effort has been made in favour of minorities. Under a law of 1976, bilingual education is guaranteed to all immigrants, both young and adult. The number of teachers providing this education in the 20 native languages of the immigrant children (7 per cent of Sweden's school-going population) grew from 835 in 1974 to 2,000 in 1977.

In spite of these advances, all the problems will not be solved until the reality of immigration and the riches it brings are better appreciated by the host society. It would be desirable that campaigns be launched to prepare the latter to see itself as a multicultural, multiracial society and to accept this fact with all its attendant consequences in the school, at work, in the life of the community, in the laws, the mass-media and recreation. These campaigns should also stress that over the past twenty years the influx of foreign workers has slowed down the ageing of the total population in most of the host countries.

In fact, what is needed is to ensure that society regards the child of an immigrant as a person and not as the fruit of an economic policy. He is, indeed, a person, with his own capacities and gifts, who has a right to education and training just as he has a right to be different.

■ Sonia Abadir Ramzi

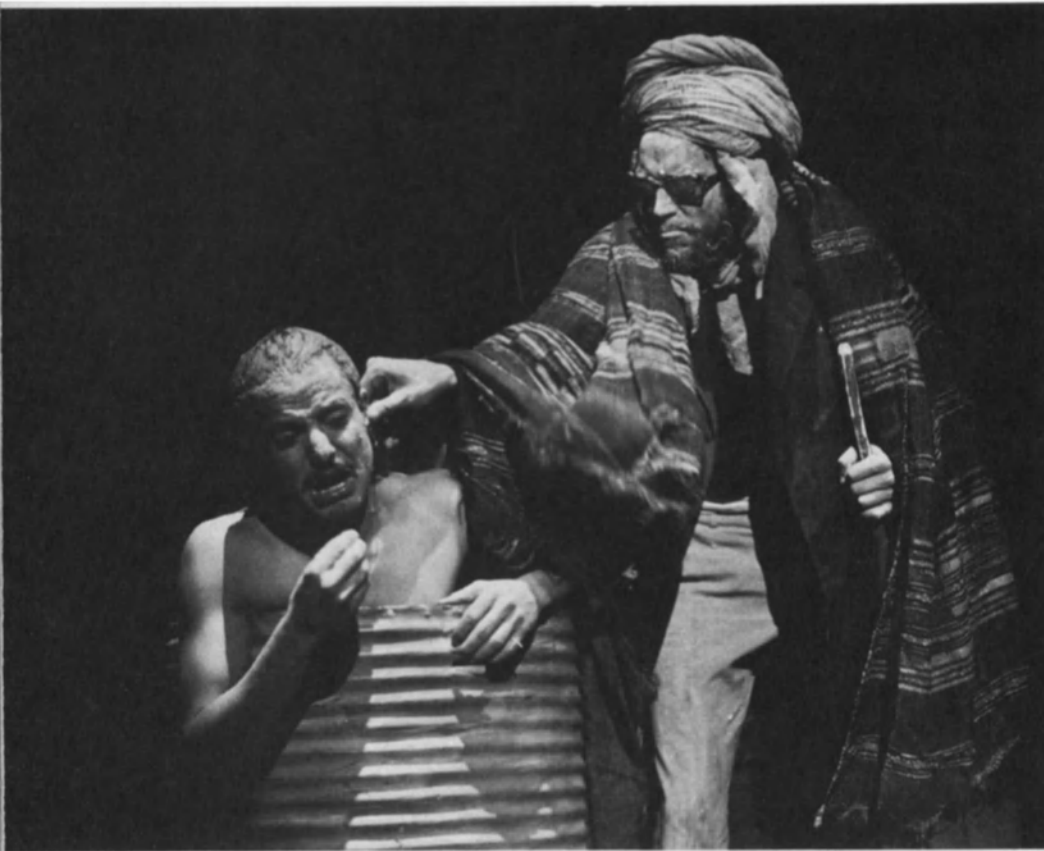


Photo Salgado Jr. © Magnum, Paris

Scene from a performance staged during an immigrant workers' theatre festival in Paris.

privileged socio-economic milieu, deprived of their traditional cultural support, having in many cases only an inadequate command of the host country's language, the children of immigrants have a disturbing school failure rate. During the symposium on immigration problems held in Luxemburg from 4 to 5 May 1982 and organized with the cooperation of, amongst others, Unesco, the representative of the European Communities stated: "We now know that the degree of failure or backwardness of 60 per cent of the children of immigrants on leaving school is still so serious that they cannot be rescued by the educational system".

Nevertheless, efforts have been made in various countries in recent years to remedy this state of affairs. In the Belgian province of Limburg, for in-

stance, action has been conducted for the past six years under the auspices of the European Community. Its aim is to improve collaboration between native and foreign teachers. Efforts are not limited to teaching the language and culture of origin. The regular teachers meet the foreign ones and gradually establish the programme of school activities. In very many cases, this has enabled immigrant children to reach the normal level of education. But the experiment is still on a limited scale; it has not been extended to Belgium as a whole (which has between 10 and 16 per cent

of foreign pupils, depending on the level). In the Netherlands, special courses in Dutch have been provided for foreign pupils since 1974 in addition to instruction in the culture of origin. Whenever the number of immigrants justifies it, schools are allowed to employ supernumerary teachers, 80 per cent of whom are recruited amongst the immigrants themselves.

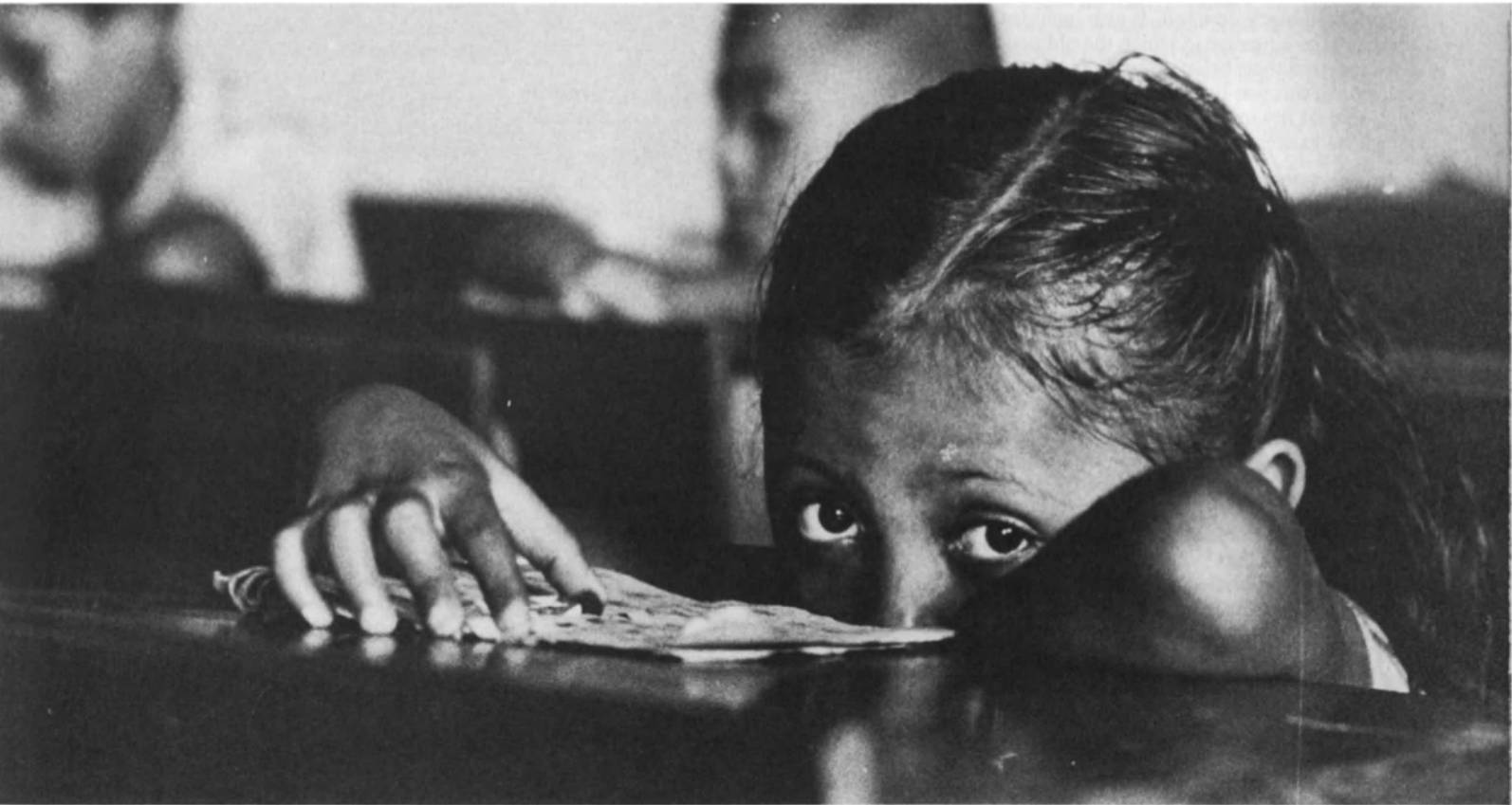
In France, the eleven training and information centres for the education of the children of immigrants have been integrated by the Ministry for Education into the teachers' training colleges in the main cities. They receive a thousand teachers per year for further training courses. Provision is made for time to be allotted to native language courses for immigrant children in elementary schools

Word within world

A critical reading of the universe

"Reading the universe must always precede reading the word, and reading the latter implies continuity in reading the former." Below, pupils in a primary school near Victoria de Santo Antao, Brazil.

Photo Claude Jacoby © Parimage, Paris



by Paulo Freire

PAULO FREIRE, noted Brazilian educator, is the originator of a method of literacy teaching which has attracted widespread attention. He developed this system, which is based on encouraging adults to become "critically conscious" of their situation, in Brazil, Chile and other Latin American countries. Formerly professor of history and philosophy of education at the university of Recife (Brazil) and a visiting professor at Harvard, he has also worked with the United Nations and Unesco. Among his published works in English translation are: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin, London, 1972), *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Sheed and Ward, London, 1974) and *Education and the Practice of Freedom* (Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative, London).

BEFORE discussing the importance of the act of reading, I feel I should say something about the process in which I engaged as I wrote this text. It is a process that presupposes a critical understanding of the act of reading, which is not simply a matter of decoding the written word or language but is preceded by and extends to an understanding of the world.

Language and reality are linked dynamically. The understanding of a text that is achieved through a critical reading implies a perception of the relationship between the text and the context. When I attempt to write about the importance of the act of reading, I feel impelled to "re-read" essential moments of my experience, from the earliest memories of my childhood, adolescence and early manhood, in which a critical understanding of the importance of the act of reading was developing within me.

While I was writing this text, I was "distancing" myself from the various moments in which the act of reading took place in my existential experience. First of all "reading" words, which during my

schooldays was not always reading the "word-world". For me the recollection of my distant childhood, trying to understand my act of reading, the special world in which I lived, is very significant. In this effort in which I am engaged I recreate and relive in the text I am writing my experience at a time before I could read words.

I can see myself in the modest house surrounded by trees where I was born, in Recife. This old house, with its rooms, corridors, cellar and spacious patio was my first world. It was here that I crawled on all fours, uttered my first sounds, learned to stand, walk and speak. Indeed, this special world was offered to me as the world of my perceptive activity and, therefore, the world of my earliest readings. The "texts", "words" and "letters" of this context (the more practice I got in perceiving it the more my perceptive capacities grew) were embodied in a number of things, objects and signs, and in the course of my contacts with them and of my relations with my older brothers and sisters and my parents, my comprehension grew.

The "texts", "words" and "letters" of ▶

► this context were embodied in the song of birds—the *sanhacu*, the *elha-pro-caminho-quem-vem*, the *ben-te-vi*, the nightingale; in the dance of the treetops swayed by strong gusts of wind that foretold storms, thunder and lightning; in rainwater playing at geography, inventing lakes, islands and rivulets. Other “texts”, “words” and “letters” were the whistling of the wind, the clouds, their colours and movements, the colour of the foliage, the shapes of leaves, the scent of flowers (roses and jasmine), tree-trunks and the skin of fruit.

Animals were also part of the context—the household cats with their clever ways of coiling themselves around people’s legs and their miaows of supplication or anger; my father’s old black dog Joli. It also included the world of language in which the old people expressed their beliefs, tastes, fears and values. All this was linked to wider contexts than that of my immediate world, contexts of whose existence I was totally unaware.

In this attempt to return to my distant childhood, as I try to understand the act of reading the private world in which I moved, I recreate and relive in this text I am writing the experience I had before I could read words.

But I must insist that “reading” my world, which was always of essential importance to me, did not transform me prematurely into a man, a rationalist in short trousers. My childish curiosity would not be deformed simply through being exercised, and here too I was helped by my parents. Indeed, it was with them that I was introduced to the reading of words, at a certain moment in that rich experience in apprehending my immediate world, an apprehension that did not contain any antipathy for its enchantment and mystery.

Decipherment of words was not superimposed on my “reading” of my private world; it flowed naturally from it. I learned to read and write on the floor of the patio, in the shade of the mango trees, with the words of my world, not those of the adult world. The floor was my slate and twigs were my chalk.

This is why I could already read when I began to attend the private school run by Eunice Vasconcelos. Eunice continued my parents’ work and took it further. With her, reading words, sentences and prayers never meant a break with “reading” the world. With her, reading words was reading the “word-world”.

Continuing this attempt to “re-read” essential moments in the experience of my childhood, adolescence and youth, during which a critical understanding of the importance of the act of reading was developing within me through the practice of reading, let me return to the period when I was studying for my baccalaureat and I trained myself in the critical perception of texts which I read in class with the help (which I still remember today) of my teacher of Portuguese.

Some of us teachers sometimes entertain a false idea about the act of reading which emerges when we insist on students “reading” a massive quantity of chapters of books in a single semester. In the course of my wanderings around the world young students often told me of their struggles

“I learned to read and write on the floor of the patio of my house, in the shade of the mango trees, with the words of my world, not those of the adult world of my parents. The floor was my slate and twigs were my chalk.” Right, a little girl in an Indian village.

Photo Jyoti Bhatt, Baroda India. © ACCU, Tokyo



with long reading lists of books which they had to devour rather than read or study, veritable “reading lessons” in the most traditional sense to which they were subjected in the name of scientific training and of which they had to give an account in a test. I have sometimes even seen in book lists indications of which pages should be read in a given chapter of a given book.

Insistence on the quantity of matter to be read, without due in-depth study of the texts so that they are understood and not just mechanically memorized, reflects a magic approach to the written word. This approach should be rejected. The same approach, although from a different angle, is found in the case of a writer who identifies the potential quality or otherwise of his work with the number of pages he has written. And yet one of the most important philosophical documents we have, the *Theses on Feuerbach*, consists of barely two and a half pages...

However, in order to avoid any misunderstanding I must emphasize that my critical remarks about the magic concept of the word in no way imply an irresponsible attitude on my part towards the need for us educators and students to read constantly and seriously the classics in all fields of knowledge, to deepen our

understanding of them and to create that intellectual discipline without which our work as teachers and students loses its viability.

From my rich experience as a teacher of Portuguese, I remember as if it were only yesterday and not long ago how I used to pause to analyse the writings of Gilberto Freyre, Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos and Jorge Amado. I would bring these works from home and read them to the class, pointing out those aspects of their syntax which were closely related to the good taste of their language. To these analyses I would add some remarks about the obvious differences between the Portuguese of Portugal and that of Brazil.

In this paper on the importance of the act of reading I am trying to show—and I shall never tire of doing so—that my main purpose has been to explain how that importance emerged in my personal experience. It is as if I were studying the “archaeology” of my understanding of the complex act of reading throughout my existential experience. This is why I have spoken of certain moments in my childhood, adolescence and early youth, and I shall now conclude by recalling in broad outline some of the main features of the proposal I made some years ago in the field of adult literacy teaching.

First of all, I have always regarded adult literacy teaching as both a form of political action and as an act of cognition and therefore as a form of creative activity. Personally I should find it impossible to participate in work which consisted in the mechanical memorizing of ba-be-bi-bo-bu or la-le-li-lo-lu. For this reason also I cannot reduce literacy training to a form of teaching where the teacher "fills" the supposedly empty heads of his pupils with words. On the contrary, the subject of the literacy learning process as a cognitive and creative act is in the pupil.

The fact of needing the teacher's help, as is the case in any pedagogical relationship, does not mean that such help does away with the pupil's creative role and his responsibility in constructing his written language and reading it. In fact both the teacher and the pupil, when, for instance, they grasp an object, feel it, perceive the felt object and are capable of expressing the felt and perceived object verbally. Like me, the illiterate person is capable of feeling a pen, of perceiving it, and of saying "pen". But I am capable not only of feeling and perceiving a pen and saying "pen" but also of writing "pen" and therefore of reading "pen". Literacy consists in the written creation or montage of oral expression. This montage cannot be performed by the teacher for or on the pupil. This is the moment when the pupil performs his creative role.

I do not intend to say more here about the

complexities of this process, which I have analysed more fully elsewhere. But I should like to revert to one point which I have raised several times in this text because of its importance for a critical understanding of the act of reading and consequently for the task of literacy training which I have marked out for myself. I am referring to the fact that "reading" the universe must always precede reading the word, and reading the latter implies continuity in "reading" the former. This movement from universe to word and back again is always present in literacy teaching. It is a movement in which the spoken word is born of the world itself through our "reading" of the world. In a sense, however, we can go further and say that the reading of the word is preceded not only by the "reading" of the universe but also by a certain form of "writing" it or "rewriting" it—in other words, of transforming it by means of our conscious practice.

In my opinion this dynamic movement is one of the central features of the literacy process. That is why I have always insisted that the words with which literacy training is organized must be selected from the universal vocabulary of the persons concerned, expressing their real language, their desires, anxieties, demands and dreams. They should be charged with the meaning of their experience of life and not of that of the teacher. Investigation of what I have called the "vocal universe" thus gave us the world-charged words of the people.

They came to us through the reading of the universe effected by groups of the people. Afterwards they returned to them, grafted on to what I called and still call decodifications, which are representations of reality.

The word *brick*, for instance, would be included in a pictorial representation of a group of building workers constructing a house. But before the oral word of a group of the people was restored to them in written form for comprehension and not for mechanical memorization, we would confront the pupils with a set of coded situations whose decodification or "reading" led to the critical perception of what culture is, through an understanding of the human practice or work which transforms the world. Basically, thanks to this set of representations of concrete situations it was possible for the group to "read" a previous "reading" of the world before reading the word.

This more critical "reading" of the less critical previous "reading" of the world enables groups of the people, who are sometimes fatalistic about injustices, to have a different understanding of their needs. In this sense, a critical reading of reality, whether made in the course of a literacy process or not, and primarily associated with certain clearly political actions of mobilization and organization, can become an instrument of what Antonio Gramsci would call "counter-hegemonic action".

■ Paulo Freire

"The 'texts', 'words', and 'letters' of this context were embodied in... rainwater playing at geography, inventing lakes, islands and rivulets... in the colour of foliage, the shapes of leaves, the scent of flowers...". Below, amidst giant lilies a boy fishes in a Brazilian river.

Photo Bruno Barbey © Magnum, Paris



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Four stumbling blocks

In 1980 an estimated 824 million persons were illiterate. Among the factors which combine to maintain or even increase the level of the world's illiterate population, four stand out. (1) A slowdown in the extension of primary school enrolment combined with population growth (right) has led to a situation in which more and more young people are out of school. (2) When they leave school early (above) many of these young people lose the benefits of schooling and again become more or less illiterate. (3) This "relapse into literacy" is also affecting the industrialized countries where it is most prevalent among the least privileged sections of society such as the unemployed (above right). (4) An increase in the numbers of refugees and migrants (below) is swelling the ranks of the illiterate even further.



Photo © José Mayans, Paris



Photo L. Davico, UNHCR, Geneva

Unesco and the struggle against illiteracy

DESPITE the huge effort that has been made to advance education and despite the progress achieved, the full exercise of the right to education is still far from being attained worldwide. The most visible sign of this, in terms of the number of human beings it affects and the number of countries it concerns, is illiteracy.

In 1980, illiterates accounted for 60.3 per cent of the adult population in Africa, 37.4 per cent in Asia and 20.2 per cent in Latin America. In spite of a decrease in the world illiteracy rate, which fell from 32.9 per cent in 1970 to 28.6 per cent in 1980, the absolute number of adult illiterates is still growing because of the population increase. There were 760 million illiterates in 1970, 824 million in 1980 and, if present trends continue, there will be 900 million illiterates towards the end of the century.

At its twenty-first session, in Belgrade in September-October 1980, the General Conference of Unesco recognized that the elimination of illiteracy had become a matter of the greatest urgency, and deserved the highest priority. At the same time, the Conference stressed the importance of acting simultaneously on two fronts to secure the general introduction of primary education, on the one hand and to promote adult education, and adult literacy in particular, on the other.

This double strategy for the development and renewal of primary education and the promotion of the elimination of illiteracy will be one of Unesco's priorities during the coming decade. Unesco's Medium-Term Plan (1984-1989) includes a Major Programme: "Education for All". This pro-

gramme proposes a new approach, designed to stem illiteracy at its source by reducing considerably the number of children not attending school, while continuing to increase the literacy rate among young people and adults. In practical terms, this implies—as matters of priority—the strengthening of national research, planning and training capacities, and the institution of regional programmes of co-operation to prepare the ground for the implementation of integrated school enrolment and literacy training strategies, the aim being to arrest or even reverse, by the end of the period covered by the Medium-Term Plan, the current trend towards an increase in absolute figures for illiteracy. As far as Unesco is concerned, activities will be directed towards four objectives:

- A better understanding of the problem of illiteracy with the aim of identifying illiterates more closely (individuals and groups) and throwing light on the reasons for illiteracy in each particular context, its consequences for the population and possible measures to eliminate it;
- Assistance in the framing and implementation of national, regional and international strategies for the promotion of general access to primary education and for the eradication of illiteracy, special attention being paid to rural areas, with stress on action in favour of disadvantaged groups and of girls and women in particular;
- Strengthening of training and retraining of various kinds of literacy workers able both to teach children and to run adult literacy programmes;
- Promotion of the struggle against relapse into illiteracy and of educational activities to help young school-leavers to develop further the

knowledge and skills acquired in school or through literacy courses, and to impart know-how which will enable these young people to find employment, particularly in the agricultural and craft sectors.

The Organization has already initiated training programmes for national literacy personnel and specialists; promoted regional conferences and regional co-ordination in the different continents; organized meetings and seminars; facilitated the dissemination and exchange of ideas, information and experience; and ensured the publication and distribution of technical documents and promotional materials. Steadily increasing encouragement and support for national strategies are accompanied by efforts to arouse and mobilize the international community, on behalf of the least-favoured countries in particular. At the same time, while encouraging the policies and measures which will enable the developing countries to render their own efforts to eliminate illiteracy more effective, the Organization also stimulates direct co-operation between countries with common problems and interests. Multi-dimensional, mutual assistance of this kind in the field of education is beginning to bear fruit, through "horizontal" co-operation such as that embodied in the Major Project on Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Regional Programme for the Eradication of Illiteracy in Africa.

It cannot be over-stressed that Unesco's contribution has been in the past and continues to be motivated by the concern to activate and materialize national initiatives, and to encourage solutions which take account of national realities and respond to specific national problems. ■

Literacy awards for 1983

At a ceremony held at Unesco's Paris headquarters on 8 September to mark International Literacy Day 1983, ten institutions and two individuals received prizes or honourable mentions for distinguished action in the struggle against illiteracy. The award winners were selected by an international jury under the chairmanship of Mr. Malcolm S. Adiseshiah, of India.

■ NADEZHDA KRUPSKAYA PRIZE

The Nadezhda Krupskaya Prize, established by the USSR in 1969, went to the **Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre**. Using a combination of radio, its own newspaper for new literates, *Moithuti*, specially developed teaching materials and 28 "learning posts", the Centre has taught people to read and write at the rate of a thousand a year over the last six years. The learning posts are set up in primary schools or village huts and serve 3,000 pupils in three of the country's ten districts. The Centre was created in 1974 and implements a strategy worked out following a survey which revealed that only about 55 per cent of the population of some 1,200,000 was literate.

Honourable mentions:

- (I) **Mrs. Joyce Robinson**, of Jamaica. After helping to establish a national public library system, Mrs. Robinson went on to become head of JAMAL, Jamaica's major literacy organization.
- (II) **Mr. Vuong Kiem Toan**, of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Now aged 81, Mr. Toan worked for 44 years to promote literacy in his country, finding local materials to replace paper, ink and chalk in time of war and later heading the Vietnamese committee for the elimination of illiteracy.

■ NOMA PRIZE

Presented by Mr. Shoishi Noma, of Japan, the Noma Prize was awarded to the **Literacy Movement of Burma** for its determined efforts, begun in 1964, to

eradicate illiteracy through a massive movement based on community participation and relying on local resources and voluntary services. The strategy adopted is to launch a campaign within a township and to continue until all the inhabitants are literate, a process which takes between one and three years. Since 1964, 231 communities have run campaigns and over 1.8 million people have become literate.

Honourable mentions:

- (I) **The National Language and Literature Planning and Development Agency of Malaysia**. The Agency works to promote literacy in the national language and produces low cost texts.
- (II) **The Latin American Association for Education by Radio**, Quito Ecuador. The Association provides technical support for 41 institutions using radio to promote literacy in 17 Latin American countries.

■ INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION LITERACY AWARD

This \$5,000 award was conferred on the **Government of Kenya's Department of Adult Education** whose programmes, launched in 1979, have reached more than a million of the country's five million illiterates. To implement the programme the Department has enrolled 3,000 full-time teachers, 5,000 part-time instructors and 6,000 "self-help" teachers. Experience in more than 13,000 classes with some 350,000 pupils has shown that an adult can become literate in six to nine months.

Honourable mentions:

- (I) **The Barreirinho Project** of the Brazilian Literacy Movement MOBRRAL. The jury thus recognized the efforts made by MOBRRAL to integrate literacy and post-literacy activities into the cultural life of the communities concerned.
- (II) **The General Federation of Iraqi Women**. The Federation has made literacy a priority aim and has contributed to the planning and execution of Iraq's national literacy campaign.

■ THE IRAQI LITERACY PRIZE

Presented by the Government of Iraq, this Prize was awarded to **Alfalit**, of Peru, a mainly voluntary institution which works in urban slums and disadvantaged rural areas. It has developed its own teaching and follow-up materials which take into account the life-styles of literacy learners. Working through centres each staffed by four volunteers and backed by the local community, Alfalit has set up 117 literacy courses and, between 1979 and 1982, taught 9,557 people to read and write.

Honourable mentions:

- (I) **The Village Education Resource Centre of Bangladesh**. The Centre promotes participation in rural development and runs an innovative programme linking formal and out-of-school education.
- (II) **The Kano State Agency for Mass Education**, Nigeria. In 1981 the Agency's basic literacy programme brought literacy to 100,000 people, thus providing a solid foundation for the national literacy campaign launched in 1982.

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The hand of Friendship

by
the Director General of Unesco

We live in an age of grave uncertainties and immense hopes, an age in which all the nations of the world are, for the first time, joined in a single network of reciprocal relationships. Their destinies are henceforth interdependent, and the scientific and technological resources at their disposal could enable them to solve the bulk of their most urgent problems.

But in order to do this, they must stand united in their purpose and combine their efforts as they face a common future. In other words, humanity must prove capable of making a transition from interdependence to solidarity.

The practice of solidarity requires that each one of us should be always at the disposal of those who, however far away they may be, remain and must remain, our neighbours.

Solidarity cannot be enforced; it is lived.

One of Unesco's fundamental tasks is to bring solidarity into effective being, for only solidarity can weave a fabric of friendship capable of uniting peoples and individuals from different cities, countries and continents.

And so today I am appealing to each of you to take part in a campaign of solidarity involving the **Unesco Courier**.

You who are a reader of the **Unesco Courier**, think of someone who is unknown to you and is yet your brother, of someone who because of his living conditions often feels alien to you, someone to whom the **Unesco Courier** can reveal all that brings you together and unites you.

Offer him a subscription and thus contribute to Unesco's efforts in favour of peace and friendship between men.

By so doing you can help make the **Unesco Courier** the authentic voice of universal solidarity.

A. M' Bow

Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow

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International literacy day

These paintings, displayed in a park in Ottawa on 8 September 1983 on the occasion of the 17th International Literacy Day, express the feelings of a group of Canadians about their handicap—illiteracy. The artists all attend literacy classes provided by ALSO, an Ottawa-based organization established to help illiterates. The 8th of September was proclaimed International Literacy Day by the Unesco General Conference, in 1966, as a means of awakening the international community to the problem of illiteracy, its nature and its social consequences. The Day is celebrated each year throughout the world so as to make known the measures each country is taking in the struggle to promote world literacy.