

ROLE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN POPULARISING THE FIELD OF SPEECH AND HEARING IN INDIA

K. MOHAMED FAZLULLA*

Introduction: Need for Public Education

Ignorance of the field of speech and hearing in the country has to a greater extent frustrated the young minds of the young people of the young profession. Ignorance of the utility of the field is also not a healthy sign for its proper growth and development. If the problems of speech and hearing are not identified and treated early due to lack of awareness among the public, rehabilitation becomes rather difficult and may not be effective. It frustrates the desire of the professionals who wish to help and also the needs of such children who need professional help. Not many people know about the speech and hearing problems. As a result many cases do not seek the available help. This escalates the intensity of the problem. Thus public education is essential for the total rehabilitation of the community of communicative handicaps. The Alexander Graham Bell Institute in USA as we know it, is solely and mainly concerned with the public education. Likewise the **John Tracy Clinic**.

Discussion

It is a known fact that the field of speech and hearing is young both in the West and more specially in our country. However this is not a rational excuse to say that it needs some more time and energy for its fulfilled growth and development, as it has come on the scene during the hey days of science and technology. This field ought to have become a living force of the community and be working in every corner of the country because six per cent of country's population i.e., 33.3 millions, suffer from one or the other speech and hearing problems. This figure makes the handicaps a very large minority community here. The governments and other agencies are doing their best to alleviate other minority communities by ameliorating their sufferings. However the same facilities have not been provided for this community of handicaps. If this community is left as it is, it is not only a blot on us but also strain on the country's economy, because, these millions may not be capable of participating productively in the country's development. Thereby a large portion of the manpower becomes a waste. On the Other hand if this community is rehabilitated it becomes a productive tax paying community and thus increases the national income of the country

• **Publicity and Information Officer, AIISH, Mysore-6.**

and further it may prevent the growth of such handicaps in the generations to come. For this purpose total rehabilitation of the handicaps becomes an absolute necessity and it is possible through public education.

Measures for total rehabilitation aimed through public education:

1. The public must be informed of the preventive measures such as to: avoid consanguine marriages; protect the ears from loud noise; have vocal hygiene, etc.
2. All possible ways and means may be adopted for the early identification to prevent escalation of the problem.
3. The public should be informed how the problem prevails; facilities available to overcome the problems and where such facilities are available for them.
4. The handicapped must be educated for their self-reliance, economically and socially.
5. They must be informed about the available occupational education and also be provided with suitable employment.

As adjuncts to these measures possible research towards better preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic devices may have to be developed and in every district and if possible in every town, centres, like primary health centres, have to be established providing clinical facilities for the communicative handicaps and also occupational education centres in every district or thana. The employers should be informed not to give a step-motherly treatment for these handicaps but to ignore the handicap and exploit the residual abilities of these people.

Role of the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysore

Soon after its inception, the Institute has taken up public education as its 'first love'. Steps taken to educate the public are:

1. *Pamphlets*: Popular public education pamphlets to begin with have been written in English language and later translated into Kannada (regional language of the state of Karnataka) and Hindi. Major problems of speech and hearing have been covered and some more are being written. In addition wall posters have been printed indicating how to identify certain speech and hearing problems, such as stammering, hearing loss, voice problems, and psychological problems related to speech and hearing.

This literature has been freely distributed to all the visitors to the Institute-medical (specially E.N.T.) personnel, teachers of the various levels of schools; teacher trainee students like the T.C.H. (for the primary and higher primary school teachers) B.Ed., and teachers attending various short term courses; district publicity information officers of the state of Karnataka; in the Institute's Speech and Hearing Camps and Exhibitions held around the state of Karnataka; to the cases and their

parents and to all those who make special requests for this literature; to the public during institution's public functions such as Open Houses, Workshops and Seminars and to the public in the places of screening surveys—such as village screening and school screening.

2. *Mass communication: Newspapers*—Articles and features on the various aspects of communicative handicaps have been published time and again. Even a visit of an expert or some VIP has been a good excuse to go to the press with the Institute's name. This has been done with the professional selfishness, with a view to create inquisitiveness among the reading public to know about the Institute. Even its admission notifications for the training programme has brought a number of enquiry letters asking about the functions of the Institute.

Radio and T. V: The staff of the Institute have broadcast a number of popular radio talks in English as well as in Kannada explaining the various problems of speech and hearing and the facilities available for these problems at the Institute. On the public demand due to its popularity these talks have been rebroadcast.

The T.V. Centres of Bombay and Delhi of Door Darshan have telecasted a documentary on the activities of the Institute, entitled "Hello Vadiraj—The World of Sound". This was an official entry of the Government of India in the II Festival of International Short Films for the Youths held at Paris and it got a Certificate of Merit also. The Films Division of India produced this documentary for the Institute. This documentary has been screened all over the country.

3. *Camps and Exhibitions:* The Institute has conducted so far several Speech and Hearing Camps and Exhibitions in different parts of the state of Karnataka. In these camps under Orientation lecture-cum-demonstration programmes to the school teachers, ranging from nursery schools to the higher school level, both the teachers of these schools and the general public covering that particular area have been told about the problems of speech and hearing. They are also appraised how they have to take care of the communicative handicapped children in their respective class rooms and further to guide the parents of such children.

Most of these Camps and Exhibitions have been conducted on the voluntary invitations of the service organisations like the Rotary Clubs and the Lions Internationals. It is heartening to note that the Lions Internationals made the year 1973-74 as the Year of Conservation of Hearing and Sight. The Institute is having a tight schedule of these Camps and Exhibitions during this fiscal year in South India.

A major responsibility of area publicity for the pre and post camps and exhibitions is shouldered by these service organisations. They publicise the programme through distribution of hand bills, displaying big wall posters, banners, screening film slides in all the cinema theatres of that surrounding area, by torn torn, announcements through loudspeakers in a mobile vehicle and fixing responsibility

upon the school teachers of the schools in the interior villages to inform the population of that village; displaying posters and requesting the medical people of the area to inform the public visiting them for medical help to send their people who are having speech and hearing problems to the camp for examination.

4. *Screening programmes:* Village screening—The entire population of some nearby villages to the city of Mysore have been screened to identify the speech and hearing problems. People who are identified with the problems have been transported by the Institute's omni bus from those villages for further detailed examination and therapy. They have also been given free boarding and medicine. Continuous follow up has been maintained.

School screening: School going children in the Mysore city are being screened to identify speech and hearing problems. The children having the problems are directed to visit the Institute for further help through their teachers and parents.

Under the teachers guidance programme the teachers of those schools whose children under therapy in the Institute are invited to the Institute and are appraised how to take care of those children in their class rooms.

5. *Public functions:* On occasions like the Alexander Graham Bell Anniversary and Institute's Founding Day, Open Houses are held for the public. Inspired by the 'Red Bag Project' of Dr De Sa of Bombay, Red School Bags are freely distributed to the deaf school going children of the city. As part of the function the children with the Red Bags along with their parents, members of the staff, students of the Institute, invitees and other general public have gone in procession in the main streets of the city. While on procession hand bills were distributed to the public. This has been done to focus the attention of the public towards the problems of the communicative handicapped children, specially the deaf. The expenses of this function was met by a charity film show. Deliberately this was done again to focus the attention of the public towards these problems.

6. *Parent Counselling:* Regular parent counselling sessions are held at the Institute— counselling the parents of the children about the speech and hearing problems. After identifying the neonates in the local maternity hospital the parents are advised to bring those babies to the Institute for further detailed examinations and counselling.

Conclusion

Whatever has been done as explained above, to educate the public is not sufficient due to the vastness of the country, illiteracy, poverty, magnitude of the problem and inadequate facilities at the disposal of the Institute such as professional personnel and funds. However the Institute as a nucleus may intensify most of the activities discussed earlier. To make public education effective and to popularise the field of speech and hearing the following methods may have to be adopted:

1. AT regular intervals feature articles on the speech and hearing problems may be published on the lines of Dr Hiranandani, Dr B. M. Abrol and Mr Ramesh K. Oza, not only in English but also in all the language newspapers, magazines, journals and digests of the country.

2. Likewise popular radio talks and discussions may have to be broadcast from every radio station of the State in the local languages. T. V. may also be used wherever available and short films on these problems be telecasted and screened in the cinema theatres.

3. Service organisations like the Lions International and Rotary Clubs and some other similar organisations may be involved to popularise it through their community service activities.

4. Popularise catchy slogans like, 'Help to hear, to speak', 'Don't say dumb—he can speak if he hears what you speak'.

5. Issue at regular intervals special postal stamps commemorating people like Sir Alexander Graham Bell, Hellen Keller with the co-operation of the postal authorities.

6. Wall posters describing the speech and hearing problems, where facilities are available and what the concerned public has to do, may be displayed in all the railway stations' display boards with the co-operation of the Railway Board. Permission from the concerned Ministry is to be got to display these posters free of cost. Similarly in the bus stations, public libraries and primary health centres. The doctors may be specially requested to refer the cases to the nearest Centres and they may also be appraised to give proper guidance in this matter. The Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity may be requested to render help for publicity through its material and machinery..

7. Separate unit may be built up at the Institute, to avoid dislocation of routine training and clinic work there to put up Camps and Exhibitions throughout the country and also to participate in the important exhibitions. Camps and Exhibitions may be put up during the Jatras, Carnivals and on such other occasions where both urban and rural people gather either for religious ceremonies or for commercial transactions. During such occasions plays in the local languages may be staged involving the main characters with one or more communicative disorders and providing relief to the characters on completion of therapy and training. In this care may be taken to remove the myths and superstitions surrounding these disorders. Stress may be made to treat the handicapped as normal and to put up with them as normals. This unit may also publish short stories and plays in the vernacular languages with this background.

8. Display of film slides in the cinema theatres all round the year on concessional rates throughout the country.

9. Immediate steps may be taken by the Institute to establish regional centres of speech and hearing in the country to work as base to provide both clinical facilities and to do research work.

10. Regular short term courses may be conducted for the medical personnel, teachers and social workers throughout the country to propagate the gospel of facilities available for the speech and hearing disorders.

It is reiterated that by these methods, as explained earlier, it is possible to educate the public and to make the field of speech and hearing popular in the country. The other institutions should also come forward to co-ordinate with the Institute to fulfil this task. Public education therefore must be given top priority in the respective institutions for the proper growth and fuller development of the field and to make it popular so that it should become more useful to the community of the communicative handicapped. The prevailing frustration then will vanish in thin air.

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