Research Paper Education

Unaccompanied Learners: Their characteristic traits and their Strategic Educational Intervention.

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ABSTRACT

This article speaks about Unaccompanied Learners. This name specifically refers to Street children and youth who loiter around in our cities. Since they have abandoned their parents and family and since we are trying to streamline them in the area of education they are called by that name. This article has two parts. The first part would explain about their characteristic features. The secondpart would speak about the intervention in the area of their discontinued education and thus their rehabilitation process.

KEYWORDS

1.Unaccompanied Learners:Children and young people taken from the street by Government homes, NGOs and other service organisations for rehabilitation to bring them out of the street.

2. Educational intervention:Placing them back in the school or college in view of continuing their discontinued education.

3. Educative intervention: All the positive experiences that one goes through in the process of rehabilitation

Introduction

Left to nature's mercy, caught up in the clutches of poverty, quenching thirst and satisfying hunger with bitter pains, justice denied- amidst all these heavy odds of existence live the millions of abandoned and orphan children and youth who long to hear a word from someone "You are worth someone!" These Unaccompanied Learners are no strangers to us because they are a familiar lot in the society. They manifest characteristic traits peculiar to their situations and living conditions. Education of such disadvantaged group of learners is of utmost concern in the modern educational scenario of our country. Empowering them through education is a rising need of the hour. Tobring them in par with the accompanied learners in the society is the duty of every educator. We cannot turn a deaf ear to the desperate cries of these little ones in our society who have no one to care for.With widespread awareness on RTE in our country, it is only right and fitting that we venture into the educational intervention of this section of our society.

Characteristic traits of Unaccompanied Learners

Unaccompanied Learners run away from home for various reasons. They lack basic amenities. Sometime they pick a quarrel with their parents. Some of them don't like to study. Others lack genuine love from their parents and siblings. For reasons like these and numerous others, they run away from home and are more oftenfound roaming around the streets of our metropolitan cities. They loiter around aimlessly due to lack of parental support and guidance. They become victims of substance abuse. A common feature we find in them is addiction to sniffing white correction fluid (solution). It is the easiest and cheapest sort of drug they can have easy access to without much of dire consequence like being caught by the police for being in possession of unwarranted items. The original drugs like tobacco or nicotine are very expensive and not easily available.

If we are observant, it is a common feature to find them more in our metropolitan cities with a piece of cloth in hand smeared with this solution or spilt on to this cloth. They sniff or inhale this solution from the cloth through mouth and go into a kind of trance. This is often adhered to when they are in hunger pangs. It is thus the cheapest and best substitute for original drugs.

They also get into other bad habits like smoking and drinking. Each of these bad habits is formed gradually because of the curiosity to test different things.

The type of chores they do on the street are very characteristic of them. They include rag picking, collecting bottles, washing plates and wiping tables in hotels,work as coolie porters and many other odd jobs to make a living.

Another peculiar feature about these Unaccompanied Learners is that they spent all the money they get on entertainment and on food. Going to movies is their greatest happiness. They watch the same movie several times if their loved heroes are there. They often become film hero worshippers because they do not come across other good role models to emulate from. This is indeed a saddening fact.

They also become prey to abuses of several kinds. They are very often sexually abused by grownups due to their helplessness. They gradually get entangled in sex rackets.

The Unaccompanied Learners are vulnerable to become drug traffickers or carriers since they are paid a handsome amount to do this and they sell these materials in a clandestine manner which will again bring them an attractive sum.

They also exhibit strong bond of unity among themselves which is very difficult to break. Any individual longs to belong to one group or other for their safety and sustenance. It is also a feature in these Unaccompanied Learners to have a leader for this well knit group. Usually the senior most in the group becomes the peer leader. Everything in the group is carried out as per the directions given by the leader. No one would dare to disobey this person. He has the ultimate say in every issue concerning them. His is the last word for them on any issue. If he is not obeyed one might even have to risk his life. His leadership is imposed on the group. The leadership is not due to his genuine concern for the members but for his vested interests.

Speaking about their social networking it is important to note their peer group loyalty. The attachment to family and to its members is to a certain extent substituted by this peer group attachment. This allegiance to the peer group is purely existential than genuine. When they are in trouble they have a point of reference.

We observe diametrically an opposite feature in these Unaccompanied Learners to what is mentioned above. There is no genuine concern and care for each other in these peer groups. Their attachments are merely existential in nature. It is a saddening fact to note at the same time that they equally do not have any genuine concern and care for their peers. They will betray each other to keep themselves out of troubles.

They are often found shabbily dressed without having proper wash and bath. Their hair will be unkempt. They will go on for days on end without having proper shower. They are least bothered about their external appearance.

Hard life on the street teaches them to be rough and tough. They can withstand any onslaught. No rain and heat will ever affect them. They attune themselves to any inclement weather. They learn to live a tough life on streets. Since life on the street is very hard and tough they also become people of that nature. The environment forces them to be that.

Generally these learners are a very talented lot. Probably it is due to their exposure to innumerable hard realities of life.

Strategic Educational Intervention

There is systematic educational intervention taking place at different levels to rehabilitate these Unaccompanied Learners. There are interventions at government and non-government levels. There are different types of strategic interventions. There are also other service organisations initiating interventions in their educational training. It is important to understand that there is an inter play of two factors during the whole process of intervention- educative intervention and educational intervention. Right from the point of first contact we could say that educational intervention begins, of course alongside with it- educative intervention. The educative intervention as such may not be evident and pronounced. That is something that would be taking place within the individual. This can only be inferred. The educational intervention in the strict sense of the term begins, when an individual is initiated into his or her studies. But for our reference we will say that with the initial contact with an individual the educational intervention already begins. But in the clarification of terms we will make a distinction between the two. We cannot speak of educational intervention isolated from educative intervention because they go hand in hand. Thus we could say that alongside with educational intervention, educative intervention travels like a shadow.

As mentioned above the educative intervention commences right at the very moment these learners come in contact with these organisations. This would be the right attitude to their intervention. The educational intervention does not mean just enrol them to a college or school. This was the understanding once upon a time. The whole process has the educative intervention as its base. We need to understand deeply the psychology of these learners. Every act of kindness shown to them right from the moment of the initial contact is educative for them. They begin to imbibe many values right from the moment of the first contact.

We can speak of a cycle of intervention. This is followed in an organisation called 'Bosco' in Bangalore. This intervention has a very scientific approach and this organisation has been at it for about thirty years and more. Since the organisation is dealing with abandoned children and youth, they work in collaboration with the police department. Every abandoned child or youth is brought to this organisation with due permission from the police. Sometimes the police themselves refer such unaccompanied to the organisation.

There are staff on duty round the clock in places where these unaccompanied land up. The places they usually land up are in the metropolitan cities, that too in the bus stands and railway stations. They are straight away taken by these staff and brought to an office in the vicinity.

As soon as an individual is brought to the office, it is important first to ask if he or she has eaten something. This is the most educative intervention. That moment the individual looks for some concern and care. It is important to understand their psychological frame ofmind at that moment – feeling of insecurity. They need to feel that they are in safe hands and that they will be cared for, then the individual will become more at home. Thus this becomes the first educative intervention ever. This is the reason for saying that the educational intervention begins at the initial inquiry doneto gather information regarding the individual's whereabouts.

In the initial contact, this Unaccompanied Learner is welcomed warmly to the institution. Though enough caution is taken to make them feel at home, they still feel out of place. It is something very natural. The initial inquiry is a very tough and tedious task. Often these learners will not open up. It is natural because the environment is strange for them. That is why we say that we need to make them feel at home and comfortable in our company. Even with all our effort to make them comfortable, they will still consider us to be strangers. Only over a period of time they will open themselves up. They will always have a fear as to who we are and what our intentions are. But as time passes they will begin to judge our intentions and motivations and will gradually begin to open themselves. In the initial inquiry we can always expect them to tell you chain of lies. Facts will unfold itself very gradually only. It will happen only after they build up true confidence in you and that you are no more a threat to their personal lives. Those interested are brought to the institution. Others are taken back home after recording their details for future reference.

The individual is brought to the institution and a data card is filled up containing the details about the child. Simultaneously counselling takes place on a regular basis. Depending on their age they are taken to different centres. Those 14 and below are in one centre and those above 14 are in another.

Once they come to the institution they try to contact their parents. If they are able to contact the parents the child is taken back home. If the child is comfortable at home, he is followed up for one more year, if not the child is brought back to the institution and the child is offered assistance to do the formal or non-formal education.

If they are not able to contact the parents they continue in the institution. The child is offered formal education. Those who are interested will be provided formal education. Others are offered vocational training. At the same time they continue to track the child's family. There is assistance extended to them for job placement in the formal and non-formal streams. Once they are settled with a job they leave the institution and manage their affairs. The organisation even settles them in marriage, in many of the rehabilitation interventions. This is the cycleof educational intervention of Unaccompanied Learners.

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