

Research on Updating Joseph Lancaster's Monitorial System of Education

By
Senior Students of Horizon Lanka Academy
Radhika Nilupulee Rajapaksha
Ranuka Udayanga
Krishanthi Priyadarshani
Teacher in Charge: K. A. Ranjith Pushpakumara

Mahavilachchiya
Sri Lanka
www.horizonlanka.org

July 1, 2005

An Openworld Horizons work-study project

Contents

1. A brief Overview of Joseph Lancaster's Monitorial System of Education.
2. Comparing Lancaster System to Horizon Lanka Academy
3. Some Notable Features of the Lancastrian System and their Feasibility for Implementation in a Horizon-Related Context
4. Bibliography
5. Appendix

The Outline of a Probable Project Based on Lancastrian Vision for Future Horizon Implementation

An Overview on Lancastrian System of Education

Joseph Lancaster was born in the slums of London in 1778. He was a Quaker. Hence he had his own quota of experience in the social discrimination that was a trade mark of the then society in England. By this time the public system of education had failed as it was producing spiritless incapable graduates. Therefore a new trend was being developed towards private education. His father too had a similar school where he taught some less privileged children lower class families. As his father's religious faith was not in agreement with that of the Church of England he was deprived of the chance of attending the schools run for the poor children. So his father had to teach Lancaster at home. Having been tortured by this discrimination he vehemently criticized this kind of religious discrimination and the corrupted system of education based on it. Therefore at the early age of eighteen he started teaching some street children in his father's room itself. However to meet ends meet he had to use radical methods. This gave him the insight of designing the so called monitorial system of education in which most of the teacher's duties were assigned to pupils who could bear the given responsibility. Among these responsibilities were teaching, documentation and most of the other routine work done by teachers.

This kind of a classroom was exciting and interesting unlike the prevailing traditional classroom and scarcely was boredom allowed in these classrooms. Lancaster wrote: "A school, governed by such order, exhibits a scene of wonder to visitors, and happiness among the children, which baffles the power of description."

Under this system, there was nothing much for the headmaster of the school to do he was just organizing the work, rewarding and punishing whenever the system needed his service. This kind of a school did not require a harsh headmaster to maintain discipline. Discipline was maintained by the system itself. In the Lancastrian system the authority was not vested in one individual whereas the authority was vested in the system itself. So even when the headmaster or the head teacher was away the school was in perfect discipline. There was no chaos in the

Lancastrian classroom even when the head master was away leaving the responsibilities of the school in the hands of the monitors

This was a unique method and it drew more and more students and a lot of students could be handled successfully providing education to as much as thousand students in language skills, mathematics etc.

To motivate students Lancaster used different methods. One was allowing the clever students to handle money as those days even the parents were ignorant of handling money. So this gave the children recognition in society. He also used a system of offering merit badges to clever students for various outstanding performances.

Entrepreneurial skills were highlighted in Lancaster's doctrine. Adult teachers in Lancaster schools had part of their income created by class attendance. Thus a teacher became a salesman and promoter of the system to bring in more pupils. This allowed even girls who could pay a few shillings. It should be mentioned that Lancastrian system did away with the existing gender barrier taking in girls as well to these schools.

It is also worth mentioning that Lancaster used very economical methods to bring down the cost of education challenging the existing Church and public schools as well. For example, slates were used in lieu of books. As books were expensive one page was used for one lesson. The class was divided in to groups of ten. The paper was placed on a stand so that the students could stand around the stand and do the lesson referring to this single page. Later the groups rotated in order to cover all the lessons. Lancaster even designed easily constructible and easily assembled buildings for schools.

Joseph Lancaster was a zealot. This was of course a source of strength as well as weakness. He believed his system would bring in a complete change in the society by expelling illiteracy completely. He wanted to propagate this system through out. The country. He also wrote a book called Lancaster System of Education. He also gave free copies to all the interested people who would venture to start similar schools.

However this brought a lot of opposition from the Church of England. Critics labeled him as a radical thinker and it would bring about the down fall of the noble class because those who wanted the class barrier accused him that his method of education will bring about the eradication of class barrier by educating the lower class children enabling them to reach the nobility.

Later, frustrated with this dirty politics he moved to the United States of America and with the assistants of his authorities

started some schools there. They flourished and then again he had had to face the same fate there too. The government took the monopoly of education and the funds were cut off leading to the death of his system.

Fortunately for Lancaster, he did not live to see its end. After coming to America he settled with his fellow Quakers in Philadelphia. But rumors about his profligate life-style and huge debts followed him from England, so that the pious Quakers shunned him. He was forced to wander from city to city, then Canada, and South America, briefly staying with friends before drifting on.

In October 1838, while in New York City to give a lecture, Joseph Lancaster was run over by a horse-drawn beer wagon, just small distance away from one of his schools. He died at the age of 59..

It is very pathetic to note what Lancaster wrote at last before his death: **"Politicians have purposely interfered in what was originally a work of pure benevolence; and though they could neither corrupt nor command the fountain, they have contaminated the stream."**

Lancaster System Compared to Horizon Lanka Academy

The Horizon school of Mahavilachchiya has much resemblance to The Lancastrian School. The public education has failed to cater to the demands of the existing job market. The then society in England according to Lancaster and other writers, had generated spiritless incapable graduates. Similarly in Sri Lanka most of the graduates who passed out from the local universities lag behind in the job market waiting for jobs or launch various sort of protest campaigns to press the government to provide them with jobs. The private organizations have job opportunities, but the graduates who pas out from our universities do not have the qualifications that these private firms ask for.

Secondly, the discrimination in the distribution of resources in the public school system in Sri Lanka offers the step mother's treatment to schools in rural areas and the students who even fail the GCE O/L and A/L in reputed Government schools easily get their own quota of job opportunities in the private arena because they have the ability to work in English, the computer literacy and the extra curricular talents that an executive of a business world should have. This discrimination has resulted from the non availability of teachers for Mathematics and English and Science. Further there is a lack or no facilities in rural government school for Information Technology in rural schools. This has also generated the class barrier in Sri Lankan society.

Thirdly, like the Lancastrian School, Horizon Lanka too has its quota of critics and opponents who is leaving no stone unturned to destroy the ongoing march of the Horizon Lanka Academy. This is a virus which can linger around any successful organization.

Fourthly, the system of monitors and the system of rewards too, are in practice to a certain extent in the HLA. But as Horizon too, is a private school which depends on donor funds it is always economically unstable. Further there is a high degree of growth in the student cadre following the success of its past students in public examinations the HLA should also encourage a system where we can use our funds sparingly and effectively.

The Notable Features in the Lancastrian System and Their Feasibility for Implementation in a Horizon Related Context.

Among the notable features in the Lancastrian Monitorial System that we at Horizon Lanka Academy should carefully look at is its economy, order of discipline and its effectiveness, and its radical approach.

Horizon Lanaka Academy is an educational institute which is funded by individual donors and various funding organizations around the world first of all focus our attention on sustainability in times to come. Therefore we must design a system where we can cater to the increasing student cadre at present. If we try to increase the staff of teachers in proportion with the number of students it will eat up a large amount of funds by way of teacher salaries .Additionally finding qualified teachers who can cater to the demands of the academy is the most difficult task of all. Hence as it was in the Lancastrian Monitorial system the clever students of horizon Lanka academy can be trained to handle some of the activities done by teachers. Further the resources like computers at the HLA are very much limited given the current number of students. There is a big rush for computer practical lessons at present. Hence we suggest the following are some of the activities.

1. Forming provincial study circles in different locations with in Mahavilachchiya to teach Computer skills and English.
2. Forming Study Circles to help weaker students in a given location.
3. Forming Research units to do small scale research offered by the Openworld Institute.
4. Forming Study Circles to Teach English and Computer skills to new students.

5. Forming Units for designing e-learning materials for Horizon Lanka Virtual Academy.

Given the Horizon Context we believe that the composition of these units and their actual tasks would be different to suit our local set up.

Out of the above list horizon at the moment is planning to start provincial centers in different locations in the Mahavilachchiya Provincial secretariat division. We hope to bring forth this as a solution to the current congestion for computer practical lessons. Horizon Lanka Academy is, at present, only capable of catering well to about 70 with its available resources. Hence we in the part one of the Appendix we have described the procedure in brief and the resources necessary for the implementation of these centers.

Further we suggest that the students who successfully get the mastery in the prescribed areas can be promoted to assistant monitors to assist the monitor who is the centre manager cum teacher and they can be offered a scholarship through Horizon Lanka's Micro scholarships project. The monitor who successfully trains in the areas identified below, the students assigned to him too can be rewarded.

The following table shows what the underlying competencies and what rewards could be awarded to students on achieving each of the competencies.

Competencies	Rewards
1.English Typing Speed 30 wpm	A USB Flash Key
2.Sinhala Typing Speed 20 wpm	A USB Flash Key
3.Formatting Word Document	A Cap with the Horizon logo
4.Preparing a Spread Sheet with Excel	2 CDs with useful software)
5.Preparing Data Base with Access	An Encarta CD Collection
6.Graphic Designing with Photoshop	An Electronic Watch
7.Preparing a Web Page	A Horizon Leisure T-shirt

Centre managers and students who are promoted to be assistant centre managers could be awarded more valuable rewards so that they will perform better and be equipped with the necessary items for their future life and in the case of assistant centre managers that this will send a message to the other students to do better in future to reach the level of an assistant.

Centre managers on successful completion of his duties **as identified by a supervisory body consisting of two or three of**

Horizon Lanka teachers who are specialized in the identified competencies, could be offered a used Laptop and the assistant could be offered some item like a digital camera.

Students who live in the neighborhood will be selected as trainees for each centre so that the problem of distance will not affect them in their daily traveling.

Once the students reach the expected level of competency in the identified areas virtual academy lessons could be given as group assignments to each centre with a deadline for each and the centre manager could assign the students with the different aspects in each virtual lesson depending on the individual competency levels of each student. This way the work will have more quality and be quick as there is division of labor in practice.

Bibliography

1. The Lancastrian System of Education by Joseph Lancaster
(1821)
2. The Psychology of Monitorial Instruction
(1824)
3. Address on Monitorial Education by Governor DeWitt Clinton
(1809)
4. The Lancaster System: An Alternative to Public Schools, by
John Chodes
5. Attendance Registers of Horizon Lanka Academy

Appendix

The required resources and procedure for the implementation of provincial computer study centers in different locations within Mahavilachchiya.

A. Resources Required

- a plot of land in the identified location.
- a building to locate the centre
- a computer
- a senior student from the vicinity to teach and be in charge of the centre.
- electricity supply.
- furniture.
- a watcher

B. Procedure.

Step 1.

Identifying a location where a considerable number of students attend the HLA and building or take on lease a room for the centre ,getting the electricity supply .

Step 2

Equipping the room with a computer and furniture.

Step 3

Finding a senior student to run the centre.

Step 4

Designing a syllabus and a criterion to evaluate the progress of the project.

Step 5

Evaluation and rewards.