

## Boat, Bus or Box - Schools of the World

**When you got up this morning, you more than likely prepared yourself for a day at school. A school with brick walls and large windows, classrooms and a library. For millions of pupils around the world, their education does not come in a red brick and whiteboard package. It comes as a bus or a boat or an aeroplane of supplies. Their education might take place in a forest, a cave or a refugee camp. They might learn using the most up to date mobile and internet technology or be educated without pens and paper. In a tent. The reasons for this are myriad – they might live in a warzone or have experienced a natural disaster or live in poverty in one of the world's largest slums. They might live far removed from towns or cities where education would normally take place. Here are a few stories from the real world of education!**

### Education – For Everyone

In first-world countries, education is seen as a right to be enjoyed by all children and young adults. In many areas of the world however, this is not the case. Education in much of the developing world is the privilege of the wealthy and families must make great sacrifices to send their children to school. Fortunately, in an effort to ensure that all the world's children are able to gain some level of education, charities are set up to help children and their parents when circumstances are difficult.

India has more street children than any other country. Hundreds of these children live, beg and work around train stations in the country's busy cities. In 1985, Inderjit Khurana, a teacher from Bhubanaswar, could ignore the children no longer. She decided to try to help those young people making a living from the busy commuter traffic. The children rely on begging and selling things in those few short minutes as the trains pull into the stations. Khurana realised that, other than when trains arrived, the children were just waiting around on the platforms. She decided to take advantage of these times. She began with storybook sessions, inviting children to join her in reading stories in between the trains' arrivals. Soon the children wanted to learn to read the stories she told them by themselves and school became a daily occurrence. Beginning with eleven students, Khurana now has a foundation that runs twelve platform schools, has job training schemes for older pupils and has helped over 6000 children.

In Cambodia the situation is similar. Cambodia actually has a fully public education system, meaning that education for all should be free. Often students cannot afford books and uniform however, or they may be asked to subsidise the teachers' salaries because they are paid so poorly. This puts education far out of reach for many young people. Often families also need their children working to earn money and cannot spare them for education. This is the case in the huge slum of Stung Mean Chey. Here, more than 10,000 people live beside the city dump and work there collecting discarded items



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that can be recycled. Collecting aluminium cans and other items, they can earn the equivalent of about one US dollar a day. Children can generally not be spared from garbage picking duties to attend school. Phymean Noun decided to do something to help the children from this area and set up a free school with financial aid from Cambodian communities living abroad. The school provides classes, uniform and supplies for free and helps train students for later employment. To convince parents to allow their children to attend, the school offers free rice and a monthly allowance to families if their children stay in school.



### Learning – In a Cave?

In the early 2000s the spotlight was placed on a highly unusual school in the rural southwestern area of China. Dongzhong was a village made up of Miao people, an ethnic minority in China. The village and school were unusual because they were in a cave! They were probably the last known people to live in a cave throughout the year in China. Education, and life in general, was hard there. No teachers wanted to work in the area as there was no electricity or running water. The school had very few supplies and no money but the villagers had done their best to create a suitable working environment for their children. They made a proper floor and roof and the walls of the school area were made of a woven bamboo. Birds and bats flew over the heads of the scholars as they worked.

With the publicity surrounding an appearance of the village and school on television, many people sent money, supplies and aid. The school soon became very successful and students were working hard. The success and publicity of the venture was its eventual undoing however. The Chinese government said that the publicity was making education in China look poor. The government closed the school and built a more traditional bricks-and-mortar one nearby.



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### Flooded and Bombed

Imagine that you woke up tomorrow and found your entire town centre destroyed; buildings collapsed, your school in ruins. For many students around the world this has actually happened. In Haiti, in the 2010 earthquake that devastated the capital of Port-au-Prince, half of the schools were damaged or destroyed. So that the pupils could continue their education in the aftermath of the quake, charities like Save the Children and UNICEF set up portable classrooms in tents so that education could continue. The tents weren't perfect. When it rained they flooded and the children couldn't attend school or had to be sent home. But when the weather was fine, education could continue. An amazing thing on an island that had seen 200,000 people killed in a single day's natural disaster.

The pupils at the schools in Haiti were able to continue their education because of a scheme called 'School in a Box'. This is a large box containing all manner of things required to set up a mini school. There are workbooks and textbooks, pencils and rulers. The lid can be converted into a portable blackboard with the application of a special blackboard paint sent with the box. These 'School in a Box' boxes are often one of the first sets of educational supplies sent out to refugee camps. While escaping violence and war, school can be a valuable place to be. It gives a sense of hope to refugee communities and provides children caught up in disasters opportunities for further development. They have often fled to countries where they are not allowed to attend the state school system since they are not citizens. The box schools allow them to earn credentials vital to later employment.



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In Bangladesh the difficult situation is a continuous one. Flooding during monsoon season means that schools are inaccessible for many months of the year. The solution? Floating boat schools. An architect, Mohammed Rezwan, came up with the idea after seeing that many of his family and friends back in Bangladesh were unable to access an education. The first school boat began travelling the waterways in 2002. There are now ninety boats and they travel along a 250-kilometre area of rivers in north-western Bangladesh. The schools have electricity through solar panels and can run four computers each. They connect to the internet using wireless technology and provide education for between thirty and thirty-five children at a time for three-hour stretches of the day. The boat stops at a number of villages, picking up pupils of similar ages and abilities, returning them to the shores



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of their village at the end of their school time and then moving on to a new group of pupils.

Education is an integral part of all children's lives according to the United Nations. It's nice to see that, where people are up against tremendous adversity, passion and innovation are still helping to facilitate learning. Knowledge can be gained anywhere as long as there is a desire to make it happen!

### Even in the Ghettos!

Even during the darkest days of the Holocaust, educators recognised the necessity of a safe, school environment for young people. In both the ghettos of Poland and the Czech Republic, and later in the camps, Jewish community leaders attempted to keep some semblance of education alive for the Jewish children caught up in the horrors.

When Poland was first invaded and the first ghettos established, the Lodz ghetto created a teaching group that saw to the education of 15,000 children in 47 schools. By 1941 this system had been eradicated however and education became more clandestine.

At the labour camp of Theresienstadt, the 'Youth Care Organisation' oversaw play sessions and art sessions for children allowing them to focus on something other than the horrors of their situation, if only for a few hours of the day.