

**United States India Education Foundation**  
**Teacher Education Administrators Seminar**  
**August 8-22, 2008**

Dr. Joanne Arhar, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio  
Dr. David Dolman, Barton College, Wilson, North Carolina  
Dr. Nancy Drickey, Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon  
Dr. Brenda S. Fyfe, Webster University, St. Louis, Missouri  
Dr. Liza Ing, Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan  
Dr. Ken Jones, University of Southern Maine, Portland, Maine  
Dr. Twyla Miranda, Texas Wesleyan University, Fort Worth, Texas  
Dr. Charles A. Peck, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington  
Dr. Vernon C. Polite, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

It was our great fortune to have been selected as a small group of U.S. teacher education administrators to participate in an education seminar sponsored by the United



States India Education Foundation for a two-week period in the month of August. The U.S. India Education Foundation had informed us that building capacity for teacher preparation and in-service professional development were key goals for India, and we were eager to explore ways to partner in meeting that goal.

Each of us came with diverse expectations, questions, and knowledge of India based on reading and other professional inquiry. None of us had visited India before this trip. Some of us had specific goals regarding student exchanges, collaborative research projects, or exploration of other kinds of potential partnerships. All of us recognized that when we study the culture and educational systems of another country, we learn more about ourselves. By putting our understandings of culture and education in relationship with those of India, we knew we would build a stronger and deeper understanding of our global responsibility for educating the citizens of the world.

The seminar introduced us to colleagues in Indian higher education and provided

significant opportunities for us to explore collaborations with Indian institutions in program areas like teacher preparation, university faculty preparation, curriculum development, and student exchange opportunities for U.S. students. We had the opportunity to dialogue with faculty and administrators from universities, officials of government agencies that regulate teacher education, officials from non-government agencies, and teachers from elementary and secondary schools in the cities of Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata. School and community visits as well as drives through typical neighborhoods presented us with the many challenges faced by this country in its slow and continuing struggle to give all of its citizens the right to a free and public education.

We quickly began repeating the observation that has summarized the experiences of so many others before us: “India is a land of contrasts”. For example, India’s investment in its academically strongest students has given it a pool of highly-educated, highly-skilled workers that uniquely positions the country in today’s global marketplace. At the same time, we join many of the Indian educators we met in observing that India’s under-investment in education for *all* students is creating a larger and larger gap between rich and poor. This issue is one we recognized as highly relevant to challenges in the United States, where the gap in quality of educational opportunities afforded children in middle and upper class communities, and those in low income communities is a focus of major concern to educators and policy makers. During this trip our US delegation learned of many government initiatives undertaken to address this issue, particularly as it is related to the caste system. We also recognized that this 3,000 year old tradition is not going to be overcome anytime in the near future. We saw government schools that were impoverished in terms of resources, teaching methodology, and which served huge numbers of children per classroom (in comparison to U.S. schools). On the other hand, in the State of Tamil Nadu, we observed a wonderful activity based learning curriculum in schools where there were very few resources, but children and teachers were nevertheless fully engaged and test scores were soaring. We marveled at the report that this shift in teaching and learning practices had been implemented in some 37,000 schools across the state in a period of only 2 years. We came to appreciate how much U.S. educators, and others around the world, might learn from these achievements.

### **Exploring Delhi: Letting Go of Assumptions**

On the first day of our seminar we had the opportunity to tour some of the many historic and cultural treasures of Delhi. The first stop was Humayun's Tomb. Vernon Polite reflected, "I noticed the star on the west gate to the temple, built by a wife for her husband, and presumed it was a star of David. The tour guide, however, explained it was an Indian symbol. I had to start questioning my assumptions about symbols and meanings." We learned also from our guide that through the centuries there have been many women who have had great power in India, yet there are many traditional forms of discrimination against women that persist today. We were just beginning to experience the land of contrasts and the need to question our assumptions and generalizations.



### **Getting (Re)Oriented**

As already mentioned, all of us had read about the teacher shortages in India and understood that one purpose of this trip was to explore ideas about how India might build capacity for teacher preparation. Yet, the vast scale and the very complexity of the social political system that forms the context for these problems were challenging to comprehend. We learned that by and large, teaching was not a preferred choice for most young people who entered the profession. The usual first preference is to study engineering or business or technology at the IIT and IIM institutions. But limited enrollment opportunities determined by high stakes testing makes that impossible for most.

Adam Grotzky, Director of USIEF, told us India needs 1,500 new universities just to meet the demand for new teachers. And yet, later in our seminar we learned that 100,000 trained teachers were not teaching, and that some areas of the country were hiring relatively untrained "para-teachers" to meet their personnel needs. Pressures of supply and demand are not unfamiliar to U.S. teacher educators—we have many challenges related to producing adequate numbers of well prepared math, science and special education teachers, for example. What was enormously impressive to all of us

was the *scale* of these challenges described by Indian colleagues.

Early in our orientation and throughout our trip we heard the statistics on the number of children out of school and the serious problems with drop out rates for those who do enter school, especially in the rural areas of the country. We understood that fifty to sixty percent of school age children are currently not attending school and that a third of India's citizens still live in extreme poverty. Drop out begins in early primary grades and accelerates as children get older. Two thirds of females are out of school. As we put all of this information in relationship with the fact that 52% of the population is under 23 and the fact that the population of India is 1.2 billion, we began to better appreciate both the intensity and scale of problems and challenges this country is facing.

### **A Cultural Guide**

On the second day of our trip we were introduced to Dr. Janaki Rajan, professor of education at Jamia University. Professor Rajan helped us begin to grasp some of the issues around education for the poor. She helped us to see that many well-intentioned efforts and support to help children perform well on state and national achievement tests, which determines acceptance into higher education, have actually led to further stratification and gaps between children of privilege, and children of poverty.



We learned more about the history of efforts in India to support more access to education, such as the government's decision many years ago to give public (non-government) schools land to build schools. Ironically, as we came to see, these schools are now attended primarily by children of more wealthy families. There is pending legislation to require these schools to allocate 20-25% of their spaces to children from scheduled castes and tribes.

### **“Education for All” and the Paradoxes of Public and Government Schools**

As we learned about the “Education for All” law established in 2001, we were simultaneously impressed at the vitality of this democracy that began only 60 years ago, and confused about how it could have taken so long to establish this right for children.

We noted with awe how much had changed in India in half a century, how the country had vaulted into a position of intellectual and technological leadership so quickly in some arenas, and yet we wondered how it could be that only 50% of children attend school.

As we met and talked with Indian colleagues from many regions and sectors of the education system, some of the social, economic and political dynamics underlying these kinds of paradoxes became more apparent to us. For example, we learned that a flourishing cottage industry has developed around “kungis” – guide books for test preparation (somewhat like U.S. “Cliff Notes”) which families with resources can afford to obtain. Tutoring for state and national achievement tests is also common among children of privilege, and largely concentrated in “Public Schools” (which we came to understand are analogous to what we in the U.S. refer to as “private schools”). In contrast, children in the local government schools seldom have access to these materials and supports. As might be expected, these kinds of differences in opportunities to learn have serious impacts on student achievement, and over time may be expected to undermine educational expectations and school morale for poor children. A recent New York Times article (“Push for Education Yields Little for India’s Poor” Jan. 2008), reported that “Education in the new India has become a crucial marker of inequality. Among the poorest 20 percent of the population, half are illiterate, and barely 2 percent graduate from high school, according to government data. By contrast, among the richest 20 percent of the population, nearly half are high school graduates and only 2 percent are illiterate.”

There are 25 states and 22 official languages in India. However, as we quickly came to understand, the language of employment is English. Since many of the government schools and especially those in poorer areas teach only in the official state language, those children become further disadvantaged in comparison to their peers in private and government schools attended by higher income families, where English is routinely spoken and taught.

Thirty percent of Indian children now attend non-government, proprietary “Public” schools, and this figure is rapidly rising among the middle class. Consequently, with the increasing flow of social capital into these “Public” schools, many Indian educators we met reported that the quality of government schools had eroded

significantly. This is a dynamic of concern in U.S. schools as well, as federal policies related to “parental choice” support the flight of middle and upper middle class families to privatized, non-government schools. In fact, much of what we saw related to the asymmetries of family resources and political supports for quality education in India substantiated our fears about similar dynamics in the U.S. In the context of our school visits, these abstractions became quite concrete and real for us as we watched parents of children enrolled in one highly regarded “Public” (private) school anxiously lined up at a school assembly—many with video cameras recording their child’s performance:



By way of contrast, we saw the following sign outside the administrative office of a school serving poor children: “Parents can meet the Principal only on Tuesdays, 9-11 am. Admissions Closed”.

We came to share the concerns expressed by many Indian colleagues about the effects of eroding middle class participation on the quality of government schools, and to recognize in the Indian context the possible consequences of similar dynamics in the U.S. Ironically, the crisis in the quality of educational opportunity afforded India’s poor children has also eroded support for some government schools among poor families themselves. One study of parents whose children had been enrolled in government schools reported they removed their child because “the child doesn’t learn anything”. We heard anecdotal reports that some teachers had abandoned their positions in government schools, while others routinely spent after school hours employed as tutors for more privileged children to supplement their salaries in government schools.

These are just a few of the many achievements, problems and paradoxes of the Indian educational context that we came to appreciate during the first days of the seminar. As we continued through the week to hear more about the current and historical status of Indian education, we began to understand some of the complex social, political and economic dynamics that have contributed to the very challenging state of education policy and practice in this culturally rich and dynamic nation. We also began to see more and more parallels with problems in educating the poorest children, closing achievement gaps, and preparing teachers in the U.S.

### **Visits to K-12 Schools**

Our group visited a diverse group of schools – including a “public” school (Shri Ram School), a federal school (Kendrya Vidyalaya) in Delhi; and a government school (Panchayat Union School) in Chennai. We visited three schools in Kolkata: two Catholic church-affiliated schools (Loreto Convent School and Loreto Sealdah Day School), and a school for children with disabilities (Monovikas Kendra). The differences could not have been more striking.

The elementary-level “public” school (equivalent to U.S. private schools) was housed in a large, attractive, modern building in Delhi and did not appear to want for resources. As we arrived we immediately noticed that children were being dropped off



by a long line of parents arriving in expensive cars. Reminiscent of well-funded “private” schools in the U.S., class sizes were small, teachers and students appeared to be middle to upper-middle class, and there was an

air of comfort, accomplishment, and enjoyment. From what we could see in our brief visit, the curriculum and instruction appeared to be fairly traditional, with students in any given classroom working independently on the same tasks. A very striking feature of this

school was the active parent support it enjoyed. The carefully prepared Power Point



presentation by the school head projected a very strong sense of shared pride between teachers, parents and school administration about the test performance and career success of their students.

A visit to a secondary-level federal school, serving the children of government employees in Delhi, offered a look at a very different environment.

Here, well-disciplined students in uniforms sat two to a desk as they received tightly structured teacher-centered whole class lessons. The classrooms were crowded, with upward of 50 students in a room. In the classrooms we observed, a predominance of stand-and-recite student participation was the norm, with teacher questions typically focused on knowing the right answer to declarative or procedural knowledge.

The government school we visited in Chennai was a marked contrast to the others we observed. Located in a poor neighborhood, the school buildings were worn and bare. The lack of funding for the school was palpable, and teachers told us that students came from among the community's poorest families. While this school may have been poor in physical resources, it was remarkably rich in the quality of its curriculum and instruction.

Using a carefully sequenced set of materials and activities, students worked individually and in small groups at their own pace. Teachers and aides moved from student to student and group to group promoting a social constructivist approach to learning, giving students guidance and feedback. The



classrooms felt like workshops as students and teachers worked quietly with materials,



moved around freely, and interacted almost like family with each other. Members of our delegation were uniformly impressed. This school had by far the most limited material resources we had seen—and yet students appeared to be participating in the most thoughtfully designed and intellectually engaging activities we

had observed in any of the schools we had visited. This school, including its students, teachers and administration, remained one of the most frequent topics of conversation throughout our remaining time in India.

All members of our delegation felt that the implications of what we observed in this Tamil Nadu government school were extremely significant: for school curriculum, instruction, and for teacher training. It appeared to each of us that the classrooms in this most impoverished government school we had observed nevertheless demonstrated tremendous engagement, efficacy and impact. We understood that this model of curriculum and instruction had been successfully implemented in over 37,000 schools in Tamil Nadu. We did not have an opportunity to evaluate this claim, but there appears to be a remarkable educational movement unfolding in Tamil Nadu that deserves to be carefully documented and evaluated. Indeed, we felt that if the experiences of students, teachers, parents and administrators we observed in this school were indeed consistent with those across the state, this model of instruction, and related systemic reform, has significant implications for Indian, and indeed, for countries around the world.

Our visit to three schools in Kolkata raised other insights and reactions. The two schools run by the Sisters of Loreto were inspirational examples of literally saving children's lives from the streets and providing them with a promising future. In particular, the Loreto Day School has developed a system of peer tutoring that appears to be remarkably effective in developing literacy among the poorest of the poor. We were

tremendously impressed by approaches to apparently intractable problems of education and poverty developed by Sister Cyril and her institution and staff.

Visiting a school for children with disabilities reminded us immediately of the many dilemmas involved in serving children with special



needs we experience in the U.S. Conversations with school staff led us to believe that (a) it is common for special education students in India to be taught in a pull-out type programs rather than in an inclusive setting with other students and (b) if this setting is a representative example, the possibility exists for providing some engaging vocational



activities for these students in these programs. The dilemmas of this curriculum approach (are these students also provided with a rigorous academic program?), as well as dilemmas related to segregation of children with disabilities (do students have access to socially-mediated opportunities to learn that are part of participating in regular classes, in

regular schools?) are well known to both U.S. educators and Indian colleagues.

### **Integrity and Commitment at the Street Level**

One of our most memorable visits was to the Loreto Sealdah School in Kolkata. The Loreto movement, begun by a group of Anglo-Irish Catholics, has a 150 year history in India of educating girls and espouses, as part of its mission, preferential regard for the poor. Since Sister Cyril took over leadership of the school in 1979, the school has reserved at least 50% of its spaces for non-fee paying children from nearby slums and has developed several outreach projects. Through these projects, Loreto Sealdah School has expanded its mission to become a resource center for the entire community.

The most well-known of Loreto Sealdah's outreach projects is the service to "rainbow children", so called because, like a rainbow, they come and go as they please.

These street children are welcome to come into the school at any time throughout the day and are taught on a one-on-one basis by regular tuition-paying children, ages 10 and higher, for two class periods each week. This program was specifically designed for those children who must survive on the streets and are not able to attend formal school on a regular basis.



Through the Rural Child-to-Child Program, about 150 students from Loreto Sealdah School go to rural areas around Kolkata once a week to teach practical math, science, and environmental education classes. Similarly, Barefoot Teacher Training is an outreach program that provides activity-based, child-centered teaching methodologies to individuals who cannot qualify for a formal teacher training program but who are, nevertheless, committed to serving in the communities in which they live. The program emphasizes practical training over theory and making use of whatever resources are available in the natural environment to teach.

The Loreto Sealdah School promotes the idea of education for service instead of education as a means of acquiring a "competitive edge". Words such as simplicity, flexibility, and community are part of the language of the school. Faculty and staff at the school view themselves as social activists as well as educators who, through their school philosophy and actions, challenge existing social inequities. Through an active program of publications, workshops, and other outreach efforts, the school seeks to modify the perceptions of those who view the worth of children through the lens of social class. As stated in a school publication, a goal of the school is "to conscientize [other schools in India] to open up their schools to children of disadvantaged communities and enable them to access some of their basic rights—education, recreation, leisure."

## **Personal Perspective**

Our responses to experiences we underwent as part of the Teacher Education Administrators Seminar in India were diverse, and powerful. In many cases, these experiences generated considerable reflection and analysis of connections between issues of longstanding personal and professional concern, and those colleagues in India were facing. The following essay by Vernon Polite illustrates the kinds of connections many of the U.S. group made as a result of our experiences.

### **Teacher Preparation in India, Affirmative Action, and Social Justice**

Affirmative Action policies in India are largely intended to correct caste-based discrimination (caste in the Indian context may be considered broadly as a proxy for socio-economic status and poverty (Indian Institute for Dalit Studies, 2008). These policies have received a great deal of national and international press and media coverage. Not totally unlike in the United States, affirmative action policies have drawn major public scrutiny, criticism, and explicit resistance across the subcontinent. Yet the expectation is that these policies will soon drill down to impact the social context of schooling in prek-12 formal schools.

As a former director of desegregation in the infamous Boston Public Schools desegregation case in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I am well-aware of how disruptive the implementation of affirmative action policies can be, especially under social protest. And even today, nearly twenty years after the major school desegregation cases in the US, most marginalized students in urban communities of the US are still trailing behind their White counterparts on most academic achievement indicators. A recent ABC World News segment ("Failing Grades," April 1, 2008) featured a report from America's Promise Alliance and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that showed 1.2 million students drop out of high school each year. The picture is even worse for urban school districts, especially those serving poor students, the new study shows graduation rates in the largest school districts range from 21.7 percent in Detroit and 38.5 percent in Maryland's Baltimore County to 82.5 percent in Virginia's Fairfax County. Most state departments of education in the United States are persistently seeking ways to link student achievement with teacher preparation [programs].

So one of the questions that begs an answer is: What are the expected challenges for teacher preparation institutions that are charged with preparing teachers who are trained and equipped to address classroom and school diversity based on caste, religious preference, and linguistic differences? One of the starting points for me, personally, is the assumption that most parents, regardless to where or how they live in the world, desire the very best future for their children. A related adage often heard around teacher preparation programs in the US is "All children can learn." I learned a great deal from talking with one Indian parent—Dev, an auto-rickshaw taxi driver, in New Delhi.

## Lessons from "Dev"--the Auto-Rickshaw Taxi Driver

My colleagues associated with the Teacher Education Administrators Seminar (USIEF-2008) ventured out early, after arriving in India, into the streets of New Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata, taking full advantage of the cheaper mode of transportation – the infamous "auto-rickshaw taxis." My colleague Brenda and I waited until our very last fleeting hours prior to departing India, before mustering enough courage to chance several short trips around the crowded streets of New Delhi with our auto-rickshaw driver - Dev. Dev, wisely sensing our uneasiness, reassured us that our lives were safe with his highly skilled driving practices and off we went into the streets of New Delhi!

I began questioning Dev about his life, hopes and dreams for his children. Dev generously shared the details of his



family life and the fact that he is a father of three, one boy and two girls. He even brandished several photographs of the family, especially his son. The conversation seemed to suggest that Dev was fairly representative of the lower income and perhaps the lower caste, possessing very limited formal schooling but of good common sense and practical knowledge. His use of English was certainly more than adequate.

Dev rents his auto-rickshaw, when it's available, generally four or five days per week and he works eight to eleven hours per day. His personal goal is to one day purchase an older, used auto-rickshaw taxi to ensure more consistency in income – but his voice seemed to indicate this as only a dream and not a true possibility (An auto-rickshaw driver on a busy route earns Rs 150 to Rs 200 a day or roughly (\$5.00). A new auto-rickshaw is approximately Rs 90,000 (\$2,225).

Dev was most passionate about the possibilities of schooling for his son. He seemed to have placed his whole heart and confidence in the efficacy of the public school system. He mentioned that the absolute most important competencies his son could master in school would be English and other foreign languages, based on his awareness of the increased number of tourists visiting Delhi as a result of India's enhanced role in the global marketplace. Dev also mentioned with pride that his son, if he truly applied himself in school, could possibly become a police officer in Delhi. Although I attempted several times to shift the conversation to his daughters, Dev never mentioned the girls' futures or their education.

Although Dev was taking us to several shopping emporiums, where tourists are commonly found purchasing souvenirs, he also explained that the owners of various shops would remember that he had brought tourists to their specific shops and during the Hindu religious celebration of Durga Puja in October, the shop owners would give him new clothes for his son—this seemed to be very important for Dev.

My limited conversation with Dev haunted me during the several weeks after my return from India and led me to a number of questions regarding the possibilities of "Education for All" in India: Will schools serving predominately lower income and

scheduled castes aid in the production of working class adults? Were certain schools preparing large numbers of youth for surplus labor positions and possible permanent unemployment, while other schools were grooming their youth for positions of power and control? What about social exclusion? (Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live (Power & Wilson, 2000).

Reflecting on my conversations with Dev, initiated additional education-related questions: What are the possibilities for social mobility? If there is a deliberate and directed shaping and molding of teachers and youth in public schools, does it occur in the absence of struggle and tension—resistance? What can be said of the reproduction of social and ideological inequities in Indian society through schooling? How can social science research assist us in understanding human nature and human agency as it applies to schooling in India? I visited the Indian Institute for Dalit Studies and spoke directly with the director, Dr. Surinder S. Jodhka. We discussed the challenges that lie ahead as India attempts to meet established targets to be realized by 2015 for the integrating, educating, and bringing the Dalits and other marginalized groups fully into the mainstream of public education.

### **The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies Examines National Attainment Targets**

The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) was established in January 2002. Its mission is to fill the knowledge gaps pertaining to issues of social exclusion and discrimination associated with caste, untouchability, (Dalits are often subject to discrimination and violence which prevents them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised all citizens of India, <http://www.ncdhr.org.in/ncdhr/general-info-misc-pages/wadwiu>), ethnicity, religious status and other group identities with a focus on marginalized groups in the Indian society. IIDS has four basic objectives:

1. To undertake interdisciplinary and application-based research;
2. To promote policy research and consultation;
3. To provide knowledge support to Dalit and other marginalized groups; and
4. To serve as a Resource Centre.

In the year 2000, 189 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations agreed to achieve, by the year 2015, the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals include the eradication of extreme poverty, universal primary education, gender equality and empowerment for women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other global epidemics, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing global partnerships for development (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgs.shtml>).

The data generated by IIDS seems to argue, strongly, that the projected MDG targets are not likely to be realized by 2015 for Dalits in India. Albeit, there are processes in place for the development of scheduled castes (Indian population groupings that are explicitly recognized by the Constitution of India as "depressed"). The scheduled tribes, however, are the most marginalized groups with their expected achievement to be lower than that of other scheduled castes in India. Other severely marginalized groups are

Indian Muslims. Comparatively speaking, Dalit Christian and Sheiks are performing much better than scheduled castes in India. It is important to note that scheduled castes make up 16.4% of the total population or approximately 160 -170 million Indians.

Notwithstanding the fact that specific social groups are trailing others in the new, emerging Indian economy, marginalized people are currently and slowly being integrated into the new economy, but predominately at the lowest levels, largely as a result of lacking in educational attainment. IIDS has produced a telling document replete with quantitative and qualitative indices, *Labor market discrimination and the urban sector: Research Series on Social Exclusion* (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2007), that explicates how the public and private sectors can and are addressing the Dalit question in India.

In the area of primary education in India, there are isolated, exciting, and innovative strategies in place in several villages and across several states, but not all or even most villages are producing innovative approaches to addressing the education of the Dalits. Drop out rates before the completion of five years of schooling are much higher for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The drop out rates in 2004-2005 at primary levels for SCs at 34.2% and for STs is 42.3% as compared to a national average of 29% (IIDS, 2007).

To its credit, the Dalit Movement of the current century (the last eight to ten years) is motivated because the Dalits are beginning to see their marginality and social exclusion, comparatively, in a global context. Dalits are also beginning to see how education will enhance their lives personally and collectively. In short, education and access to education is having an emancipatory effect on the Dalits (see Friere, 1970). There is a tremendous desire for all types of social mobility among the Dalit communities.

India is moving forward in the global economy and the Dalits are a part of this movement. Politically and economically, however, the Dalits continue to be “resource-less.” They do not possess any assets so it is literally impossible for the Dalit groups to keep up with their own ambitions without government support. In short, the Dalits are not invisible. They are very much a part of the Indian nation. Although they are often the topic of conversations in state assemblies and Parliament and there are achievement quotas for them in schools and universities etc., but on the ground levels, the realities change very slowly because the Dalits do not have resources—they do not own land or other assets and they do not have significant social networks—they remain marginalized.

According to the director, Dr. Surinder S. Jodhka, IIDS is attempting to understand the changing patterns of marginality and social exclusion. IIDS attempts to inform social policy in an effort to assist the progress of the Dalits. All too often, according to Dr. Jodhka, social policies are generated for political purposes, but there is a need for social policies that are driven by social science research. IIDS endeavors to engage in meaningful social science research, often in collaboration with university-based researchers, that is essential to the work of public policy makers. IIDS is a relatively small organization, but it is aligned with a network of scholars located around the world who are “friends” and committed to understanding and improving the plight of Dalits in India.

IIDS is still not financially supported by the government of India and does not receive federal financial support, factors that limit IIDS’s ability to attract the resources

needed to step up its research agenda. Often IIDS receives soft money through grants from Indian and international foundations. As grant funding ends for a specific project, there is a shift in research foci to meet the demands of new available grant dollars.

Although teacher preparation does not appear to hold the same esteem as the social sciences in India, most universities in India have programs which address various aspects of social exclusion and the caste question. In fact, social research in India is very strong.

The forthcoming federal affirmative action policies which will require private schools to reserve as many as 25% of their seats for Dalits is presently fiercely debated among politicians and educationalists in India. Indian middle class, not all but many, tend to be rather conservative and not interested in sharing their resources with new categories of people who want to join the middle class – they are resisting, using their political hegemony to circumvent the implementation of the spirit of the reservation policies. For example, good government schools are now losing their distinction because the upper and middle class parents have withdrawn from those schools, opting to send their children to private schools. One emerging practice among Christian/missionary schools is to run two shifts with a morning shift for the upper and middle castes and a late afternoon session (for Dalits and other poor people from slums communities). There are good intentions but segregation continues, those who complete the evening schools seem destined for employment as bus drivers or other lower status jobs. Morning school students will become researchers and scientists—schools continue reproduce and foster inequality.

### **Social Justice and Teacher Preparation in India: The Possibilities!**

It is probably a good thing to weave principles of social justice into the preparation of teachers. If law, social work, nursing, psychology, etc. can speak the words, "social justice," professional educators certainly need to have an understanding of what social justice means in the preparation of professional educators. As documented by the IIDS, Dalits and other poor and marginalized groups in India have realized noteworthy progress during the past decade, but the educational advancement of these groups has not matched their growth in numbers in India. Perhaps there is a need for a national and/or state effort to help teacher preparation institutions "define" social justice as it relates to schooling. Social justice is a well-established social "ideal" that speaks to how an institution defines diversity, recruits and retains its faculty and students; how an institution considers its faculty and their relevant qualifications; and how university allocates its funds to ensure diversity and justice.

Diversity is one matter--it does not ensure that "All students will learn and achieve," only social justice can attempt to properly address myriad issues which preclude the possibility that all children have access to a quality education (the core principle of social justice). Social justice tends to equalize disparities in educational attainment, educational achievement and socio-economic status, and the impact of prejudice and discrimination on educational attainment.

It is social justice that ensures that all students, educator candidates, and faculty are protected against discrimination, physical abuse, emotional distress, and social stigmatization regardless of their race, gender, class or caste. Attitudes, aspirations, and motivation are also of importance and explain a large portion of the social imbalances

that remain after the removal of more tangible factors. Therefore attention must be paid to the social environment students come from and assess their opportunity for academic achievement in their formative years.

--Dr. Vernon C. Polite

### **The Need for Systemic Change in Teacher Education**

One of the truisms of international travel has to do with the value of such experiences in generating new perspective on one's own cultural institutions and practices. This was a constant topic of conversation among the U.S. teacher educators as we traveled through India and talked with teachers and teacher educators in schools, institutions of higher education, and state and national agencies. We were struck by the familiarity of many of the challenges our Indian colleagues described—although we were also constantly impressed by the differences in intensity and scale of some of these. A general consensus among our group was that U.S. educators had much to learn from colleagues in India.

In reflecting on our experiences, several specific meetings and visitations appeared pivotal to our conversations about what we were observing, and how what we were seeing related to challenges to the field of teacher education in the United States. One such “pivotal experience” was our visit to the government school in Tamil Nadu (previously described). If our first impression of this school was dominated by the absence of many of the resources and material supports for education we commonly take for granted in the U.S., this perspective was quickly supplanted as we began to appreciate what was going on in the classrooms. Students were deeply and energetically engaged in a variety of rich instructional activities organized



systematically to allow pairs and small groups of students to work together within a carefully planned curriculum. The curriculum itself was aligned with the national standards framework, but also carefully grounded in activities related to local and regional culture. The teachers we observed were tremendously enthusiastic about the responses of children to curriculum and instruction practices they were using, and described how this model had been adopted as part of a state wide initiative to replace traditional drill and practice methods with a more student-centered and activity-based pedagogy. One of the stories we heard several times was that many students (and some teachers) whose families had given up on the government schools in Tamil Nadu were returning as stories of the success of these new methods spread through the community. The sense of excitement was palpable, and both students and teachers eagerly demonstrated what they were doing, all carefully documented via classroom assessment records maintained for each child. This school visit was a frequent topic of conversation among the U.S. delegation for the remainder of our time in India. There was strong agreement that what we had seen was one of the most impressive examples of



educational innovation we had encountered—anywhere. Perhaps most astonishing, it was our understanding that this educational model had been successfully implemented in over 37,000 government schools in Tamil Nadu...*over the past two years.*

Clearly, our delegation was not in a position to evaluate the work we observed at this school in Tamil Nadu in any scientific way, much less evaluate the claim that local and state educators had been able to implement these practices in such an astounding number of schools in such a short time. However, what we observed was enormously impressive, and we subsequently met other teachers from Tamil Nadu (at a conference in New Delhi the following week) who confirmed the story we had heard about the success of this systemic reform. However, in

inquiring about this reform effort as we visited universities and government agencies, we were surprised to find out that it was virtually unknown to the teacher educators we met. Even university faculty in Chennai appeared unaware of the innovations taking place in their own region. The sense of disconnection we sensed between university faculties and innovations in the local schools was disturbing, and familiar, to many members of the U.S. delegation.

A second “pivotal experience” we had during our visit took place in a meeting we had with a group of national education policy researchers. The conversation began with an observation (by a nationally prominent and highly respected educational policy analyst) to the effect that “teacher education is the weakest link in the educational system”. This comment was not intended (nor so taken by the U.S. delegation) to be rude. It was intended as a statement of self-evident fact. Equally strong assertions were made to the effect that teacher preparation was one of the most important national educational agendas. These somewhat paradoxical statements are quite familiar to U.S. teacher educators, where teacher quality is often considered “what matters most”, and teacher preparation programs are often viewed with considerable skepticism by the broader education policy community. This conversation made us acutely aware of how many challenges and concerns we shared with our Indian colleagues.

Taken together, our observations in Tamil Nadu, our conversations with university faculty in the regions we visited, and our discussions with educators in state and national education agencies, lead us to wonder about the general state of affairs in teacher education, and what might be done to improve the alignment of the ways teachers are prepared with the work they will need to undertake, particularly in schools serving the poorest children. These problems are by no means unique to India; they are a central concern of educators and policy makers in the United States, and in many countries throughout the world. The following comments are offered in the context of the insights we developed in recognizing the similarity of challenges U.S. educators face and those we observed in India. These must be considered in the context of our very limited time in India.

## **A Shared Agenda for Systemic Reform in Teacher Education**

Recognizing some of the challenges shared by teacher educators in India and the U.S. suggests the potential value of clarifying some common agendas for research, development and change. We offer several examples where we believe ongoing efforts at systemic change in both countries may be mutually informative with respect to shared goals:

- *Development of models for shared governance of teacher education programs.* One of the issues that is most problematic in achieving stronger alignment between teacher education programs (particularly those situated in universities) and the work of educating poor children in particular, is the fact that teacher education programs are situated in organizations that are not directly linked (much less directly accountable) to the schools. There is a clear need, both in India and in the U.S., to develop governance models which drive stronger communication, collaboration and mutual accountability between schools and university programs. We are not naïve about the difficulties of developing, implementing and sustaining such models. However, some promising examples do exist—in both the U.S. and India. The focus of research and development efforts to create governance models which support (and propel) stronger university-school collaboration in teacher preparation must be strategically grounded in direct work with poor children if we are serious about preparing new teachers to work in high-poverty schools.
- *Development of information systems that support improvement of teacher education programs.* One aspect of such an information system has to do with the challenges of developing reliable and valid measures of teacher competence and effectiveness. Another has to do with creating organizational policies and supports for transforming information into knowledge, and knowledge into action (see Moss, 2007, for a broad and informative discussion of these issues). While many U.S. policy makers are currently focused on using “valued-added” methods to link achievement test data with teachers, and with teacher education programs, we think this approach is not likely to inform program improvement efforts in a useful way. Outcome measures which offer richer description of actual teacher

practice and (related) student learning at the classroom level appear a more promising approach to providing feedback to teacher educators relative to improvement of their programs (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). A serious barrier to wide spread adoption of these kinds of outcome measures is of course the issue of cost; this is an issue in the U.S. as well as India. This must be weighed in the context of the ongoing costs of public investment in teacher education programs that have very limited means of assessing (and improving) their relevance and effectiveness in preparing teachers to teach the country's poorest children.

- *Development of policies, programs and practices which support recruitment and retention of new teachers, particularly those serving poor children.* We were impressed and dismayed by the stories we heard from Indian educators about the difficulties they were experiencing in recruiting prospective teachers, particularly as these were believed to be affected by the explosion of opportunity and interest in information technology fields in India. A closely related problem is retention of trained teachers, particularly in schools serving the poorest children. This is another problem we share. Data on teacher retention in the U.S. suggests that up to 50% of new teachers leave the classroom within the first few years of teaching. In both the U.S. and India there is a clear and pressing need for both incentive and training programs that will attract new teachers into the field, prepare them to teach in difficult conditions, and support them in the first years of teaching.
- *Development of research and demonstration projects related to educating the nation's poorest children.* As we described above, each of the members of our U.S. delegation was enormously impressed by the sophistication and apparent success of the educational model we saw being implemented in Tamil Nadu. We were surprised that this model, and the brilliantly practical techniques for delivering high quality, carefully organized and "student-centered" curriculum to large numbers of poor children, was not more widely known among teacher preparation institutions. We believe the Tamil Nadu model, and others like it, merit careful research and evaluation as resources for other communities and regions—and as a resource for programs of teacher preparation. The goal of these research and development projects would be to create stronger and more

systematic linkages between the curriculum taught in teacher education programs and innovative models and practices developed in the schools where new teachers are needed.

### **Potential Collaborations**

Research projects need to be collaborations between U.S. and Indian scholars where reciprocity is the standard. Further, "...educational researchers have been slow to acknowledge the importance of culture and cultural differences as key components in successful research practice and understandings. As a result, key research issues of power relations, initiation, benefits, representation, legitimization, and accountability continue to be addressed in terms of the researchers' own cultural agendas, concerns and interests" (Bishop, 2005, p. 110). From this perspective, a set of questions might frame collaborative research with Indian scholars and teachers:

- Initiation: Whose concerns, interests, and methods of approach determine/define the outcomes?
- Benefits: Who benefits or is disadvantaged by the research?
- Representation: Whose research constitutes an adequate depiction of reality?
- Legitimacy: What authority can we claim for our texts?
- Accountability: Who has control over the initiation, procedures, evaluations, text constructions, and distribution of newly defined knowledge?

### Research Projects

There is particular interest in developing a collaborative research project to document the movement toward child-centered teaching in Tamil Nadu inspired by our visit to Panchayat Union School (Government School in Chennai). This might involve scholars interested in how networks of teachers engage in systemic change, the development of literacies based on constructivist learning theory, and other areas of mutual interest.

A grant has been submitted by Dr. Twyla Miranda at Texas Wesleyan University to Dollar General, a large U.S. business corporation who funds international literacy projects. The grant is entitled "International Literacy Buddies: Students in Texas and India Build Community Using Storybooks, Thinking Maps and Art." Approximately 80

children from grade 4 in one low performing school in greater Ft. Worth, Texas, will be chosen to participate in the International Literacy Buddies project, as “literacy buddies” for approximately 80 children who attend class 4 in Panchayat Union School in rural Chennai, Tamil Nadu for a total of 160 children served. Texas state test reading scores for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in Ft. Worth are reported as 81% and 74% passing, respectively. Educators in Ft. Worth Independent School District and in Chennai, India, recognize that important literacy as well as global understandings may occur through communication and sharing common projects with an international “buddy.” In addition, because this project will include 26% of the Ft. Worth students who are reading below acceptable test scores, the communication and global community involvement will be highly beneficial to such low-performing students. If granted, data will be collected pre- and post-project to determine attitude and literacy growth in both Texas and India selected populations.

The Indian Institute for Dalit Studies (IIDS) is not supported by the government of India, but it works in collaboration with universities across India. IIDS functions largely on "soft" money and has received grant funding from major US funders (Ford, Gates, etc). Although, small, IIDS also collaborates with scholars from many US universities and agencies. If US faculty are interested in the study of caste in India or promoting the development of disadvantaged groups in the India, IIDS is a great possibility. IIDS includes the work of an interdisciplinary scholars in economists, sociologists, statisticians, educationalists, etc.

A master’s student in special education has just returned from a two week training session on special education in India. She has great interest in special education teacher training in India and is currently completing an independent study at Kent State University looking at the needs of Dalit children. She has created a video as part of an independent study and would like to explore potential collaboration with Manovikas Kendra.

#### International Exchange of Scholars and Teachers

An international exchange of scholars has the potential to continue building cross-cultural understanding as a foundation for future collaborative research projects. We have already begun to explore with our home institutions the possibility of “sharing”

scholars. For example, Eastern Michigan, Kent State University, Ferris State University and Webster University are exploring the possibility of sharing a scholar in residence. Manovikas Kendra, Rehabilitation and Research Institute for the Handicapped in Kolkata (A. K. Sanyal, Project Director and CEO), a special education policy making group in Chennai has a long standing history of collaboration with universities and expressed interest in collaborating with US special education faculty and doctoral students.

Books and journals about international movements in education were shared and discussed with Indian researchers and teacher educators. In particular, several members of the U.S. delegation spoke of the internationally acclaimed approach to early childhood education in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Interest was expressed by Indian colleagues to further explore the Reggio approach. As a result, a joint visit to Reggio Emilia by Dr. Rajan and one or two other early childhood education professors is currently being arranged through Dr. Brenda Fyfe of Webster University for the spring of 2009. This introductory trip will include visits to the Reggio schools and the Malaguzzi International Center for Early Childhood Education to learn about ongoing research on early learning in the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia. Dr. Fyfe will introduce our Indian colleagues to the Executive President of Reggio Children, Dr. Carla Rinaldi, to explore future collaborations between early childhood educators in Reggio Emilia and India.

### On-Line Degrees

There seems to be an interest on the part of several Indian universities/colleges and governmental agencies to establish on-line master's degrees in collaboration with US institutions of higher education. Integrated special education/regular education, counselor education, and administrative preparation programs were of interest. But issues surrounding funding (tuition for US colleges is prohibitive for most Indian students; cost-share formulas need to be worked out); how curriculum would be adapted to the context of Indian education, how faculty would work together to design/ modify curriculum, access to technology, how orientation sessions for Indian students would occur (many on-line programs require that students meet together for the first session or at some point during a course or program), etc.

Initial steps are being taken to develop a joint on-line master's degree in special

education/regular education between University of Southern Maine and Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi.

Lady Irwin College of the University of Delhi expressed interest in a master's degree in Counselor Education and Educational Administration and Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services will explore with them these possibilities. Building on its experience in developing the first cadre of school counselors in conjunction with the College of the Bahamas, Kent State University will explore what it might take to create such a degree option.

### Student Exchanges

Strong interest was expressed by both American and Indian faculty in student exchanges as a way to increase understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of both countries. Short term seminars for students (one summer or one term in length) provided the opportunity for students to continue work at their home institution while receiving college credit for studying abroad. The tuition saved for US institutions who charge US students full tuition for study in India where the tuition is much lower can be used to subsidize Indian students coming to study at the same US institution. Interest was expressed in having Indian students complete part of a program of study at a US institution who would grant the degree.

The Center for Cultural Resources and Training not only offers professional development opportunities for India teachers, but is also willing to tailor on-site programs for American college students and teachers interested in learning about the cultural heritage of India and how to integrate that into their curriculum.

Student teaching and field-experience opportunities for teacher education students from both US and Indian teacher preparation programs were explored. Since teacher education is part of a BEd degree that is separate from the three year BS degree, differences exist in programs that would have to be negotiated.

Service learning opportunities abound in India's orphanages, schools serving street children, and NGO's serving the needs of children and youth. American students seeking such experiences as volunteers or as part of more formal intersession programs or field experiences would have a multitude of organized opportunities to work in India. For example, Dr. Nancy Drickey at Linfield College submitted a proposal to take 12-15

students to India during January term 2010 to study Indian culture and education by volunteering in schools in Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata.

Overseas student teaching remains an option for students in universities with such programs in place. For example, COST, the Consortium of Overseas Student Teaching has been engaged in arranging student teaching experiences since 1973 has provide unique opportunities for prospective teachers to become sensitive to, and better informed about, international and domestic affairs. Formal agreements have not yet been arranged with Indian institutions, but there is interest in doing so.

### Internationalizing the Curriculum

As teacher educators, we have an obligation to reexamine the role that we play in guiding future teachers to become contributing citizens in a society that is increasingly characterized by rapid change, diversity and interconnectedness. Developing sensitivities, attitudes, perspectives and skills is nowhere more important than educating the next generation of teachers. We need to internationalize the curriculum of teacher education in such a manner that all teachers gain a knowledge of the international dimensions of their discipline as well as the social context of the children they teach. Since most students will not participate in study abroad programs, we need to consider other ways to incorporate international perspectives in courses that are taught. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are needed to become teachers who know how to meet the needs of students from an increasingly diverse background? to collaborate with teachers from other countries? to understand that the content one teaches may be viewed differently from another perspective? to use resources beyond the textbook as a means of challenging school-age children to other ways of thinking?

Participation in the two-week Teacher Education Administrators Seminar opened our eyes to the beauty and culture of incredible India. We now have a better understanding of the educational policy and practices of India and can compare the similarities and differences with the challenges we face in the United States. We are eager to move forward in engaging in collaborative, participatory research with international colleagues and indigenous peoples, working together on international

exchanges of teachers and scholars, internationalizing the curriculum, providing student exchanges, and teaching on-line courses for international students. We have great plans for making a difference yet realize that much more is needed. We hope the United States India Education Foundation will continue to support similar programs in the future.



## References

- Bishop, R. *Freeing ourselves from neocolonial domination in research: A Kaupapa Maori approach to creating knowledge* (pp. 109-138). In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (editors), (2005). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Gengupta, S. (2008). Push for education yields little for India's poor. *New York Times*, January 17, 2008.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (2007). Labor market discrimination and the urban sector: Research series social exclusion, 1 (1), 1-78.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (2008). Will India's Attainment of MDGs be an Inclusive Process? Author.
- Moss, P. (Ed.) (2007). *Evidence-based decision making*. 106<sup>th</sup> Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Pecheone, R. & Chung, R. (2006). Evidence in teacher education: The Performance Assessment for California Teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57 (1), 22-36.
- Power, A. & Wilson, W.J. (2000). Social Exclusion and the Future of Cities, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, London