

Organizing an NGO-sponsored English-Medium School in South India: Lessons Learned

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This paper describes lessons learned from the first-year education efforts of Rising Star Outreach of India, a U.S.-based nongovernmental charitable organization (NGO) working with leprosy colonies in Tamil Nadu, India. In 2008, Rising Star Outreach established a residential school to provide English-medium schooling for 180 colony children in Standards K through 8. Using lived experience methods of phenomenological research described by Manen (1990), the author describes six themes derived from personal experience during the a full year of organizing and directing the school, including obtaining government recognition, organizing school governance, working within local school culture, hiring and training teachers, providing English-medium instruction, and establishing and maintaining positive relations with parents and families. The themes include lessons learning that can benefit other organizations endeavoring to establish schools in developing areas.

Keywords: International education, Development, Educational administration, India, Leprosy

This paper describes lessons learned from first-year education efforts of Rising Star Outreach of India, a U.S.-based nongovernmental charitable organization (NGO) working with leprosy colonies in Tamil Nadu, India. For someone outside India to understand and utilize what was learned during this school experience, knowledge of the context of leprosy colonies and the social and economic situations of children born in these colonies is important. Therefore, the paper begins with a brief review of research pertaining to private English-medium schools in India followed by an explanation of the leprosy condition and the status of leprosy services in south India. This is followed by an overview of Rising Star Outreach and the Peery School. The remainder of the paper presents six topical areas pertaining to the initial year of operation and the lessons learned from organizing and directing an English-medium school for children from leprosy-affected families.

English-medium schools in India

There is an established perception in India that an English-medium education is the gateway to social and professional success (Markee, 2002; Yakkundimath, 2003). This is to be expected among well-to-do families, but it is especially common among parents of poor and otherwise disadvantaged children for whom private schools are preferred over perceived low-quality government schools

(Mehrotra & Panchamukhi, 2006; Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2006). Researchers caution that many schools offering English-medium instruction are informally established and unrecognized by the government, and therefore not subject to regulatory oversight regarding safety, sanitation, or the quality of curriculum and instruction (Kamat, 2007; Mehta, 2005; Miller, 2005). Nevertheless, the growth of English-medium schools is outstripping that of vernacular-medium schools in many areas of the country, sometimes by a ratio of three to one (Mehta, 2005). Evidence indicates that the marketing power of English-language curriculum and instruction often outweighs questions of quality in parental considerations about school choice (De et al., 2005; Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2006).

Although there is a growing research base regarding the provision of English-medium educational opportunities to marginalized populations in India and other developing nations, a search of U.S. and international databases failed to locate studies of private English-medium schools targeting the leprosy population. This paper addresses educational efforts specifically targeting children of leprosy-affected families.

Leprosy and modern India

Leprosy is an infectious disease that mainly affects the skin, peripheral nerves, eyes and mucous membranes, resulting in loss of

sensation in the extremities, muscle atrophy, and unfelt injuries susceptible to infection (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). The disease has existed for centuries, with the earliest record dating to 600 BC (World Health Organization, 2010a). Fortunately, leprosy today is readily treatable with a multidrug therapy that stops the progression of active leprosy and cures the disease in its early stages (World Health Organization, 2010a). Elimination of the disease is said to be attained when occurrence rates fall to less than one case in 10,000 persons, a target achieved in all but a handful of countries (World Health Organization, 2005). India announced elimination of the disease in 2005, but there is some question about the accuracy of the data collection methods (Feenstra, 2003). Statistics from the World Health Organization indicate that India is very close to reaching the elimination target, with just over 133,000 new cases reported in 2009, or 1.1 cases for every 10,000 persons in a population of 1.15 billion (World Health Organization, 2010b).

Perhaps the most far-reaching effects of leprosy result from excluding patients and their families from active participation in mainstream society. Even though modern medicine has shown that the risk of infection is small and the disease is readily treatable, areas with a history of leprosy retain the old attitudes (Jacob & Franco-Paredes, 2008). Patients have historically been interned in colonies or institutions to protect others from infection, making it very difficult for leprosy sufferers to access needed medical care or to maintain gainful employment. As a result, begging is the traditional approach to supporting themselves, and colony families generally live in poverty, even with government stipends (Overdorf, 2009). The social attitude toward leprosy carries over to non-infected family members in additional ways. When patients marry and bear healthy offspring, the children suffer the effects of stigma by association, including lack of social acceptance at public schools (Overdorf, 2009).

Overall, the effects of leprosy and its stigma in modern India include ongoing health problems, poverty, and inadequate education for children. This has attracted the interest of charitable organizations both inside and outside the country, including Rising Star Outreach of India.

Rising Star Outreach of India

Rising Star Outreach of India (Rising Star) was founded by Rebecca (Becky) Douglas in 2002 as a U.S.-based tax-exempt charitable organization to address the tragic suffering of leprosy patients and their families in south India. When Becky witnessed the desperate condition of leprosy beggars during a visit to India, she decided that she and a group of friends could do something to help. Their first approach was to support existing organizations in their efforts to provide services, but these seemed inadequate so the group established their own organization.

The first Rising Star educational project was to start a children's home in a rented building in Chennai to provide schooling for a few children. As the word spread and more families requested schooling for their children, the organization rented a second home. It soon became apparent that a permanent solution was needed, so land for a rural campus was purchased in 2005. Two children's homes, one for boys and one for girls, were constructed in 2006, and the first wing of the school was completed in 2008.

Meanwhile, Rising Star teamed with Padma Venkataraman, an influential Indian leprosy welfare advocate, to start a micro-finance program to help the leprosy affected pursue business opportunities as a way to move beyond their reliance on begging. This was followed in 2005 by establishing a mobile medical team that regularly visits local colonies. Thus, in a relatively short period of time Rising Star established its three-part mission: to provide education, micro-finance, and health care for persons with leprosy and their families.

Peery School

The school was founded by Rising Star in April 2004 in the rented facilities in Chennai. Peery Matriculation School, named for the principal donor and completed in 2008, is situated on a 13.5 acre rural campus that provides residential housing, healthcare, school, and volunteer services for about 180 students in standards K through 9. An additional wing was dedicated in July 2010, making the facility large enough to eventually provide schooling through standard 12. The school serves children from 34 leprosy colonies and 4 cities in the state of Tamil Nadu.

The school was established to address three concerns regarding children in the leprosy colonies. The first concern is that teachers and other students often treat the colony children with such indifference that they ultimately do not want to attend public school. The second concern is that the quality of education in many local government programs is so poor that parents are convinced their children do not benefit from school. These two concerns lead to the third, which is that parents use the issues of poor treatment and poor education to justify keeping children out of school and using them instead in the traditional leprosy patient role as beggars (Rebecca Douglas, personal communication, November 10, 2010). Parents have long since learned that the emotional effect of disadvantaged children prompts higher levels of giving. To shield the children from this circumstance, the first rule established by Rising Star was that children must live at the facility, and parents cannot take them out of school to beg. If it is found that parents have taken children out of school supposedly for a wedding or funeral but actually use the children for begging, then the children are not readmitted to the school (Rebecca Douglas, personal communication, November 10, 2010).

From its beginning with 27 children in the rented buildings, the school's enrollment has since grown steadily. The majority of the students come from various colonies, but during the 2008-09 school year about 40 were local village children. Inviting local children to enroll is part of Rising Star's effort to eliminate the stigma of leprosy by schooling children who are associated with the colonies with children who are not. The intent is for the local children and their families to learn that those from the colonies are not different from other children.

Method

This study employed lived experience methods as described by Manen (1990). Lived experience falls within the scope of hermeneutic phenomenology and includes studying a phenomenon that is of interest, examining experience as lived by the researcher, describing the themes that exemplify the phenomenon, and addressing the parts and the whole of the phenomenon to reflect on the experience (Manen, 1990). The intent of this type of phenomenological

writing is to "construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (Manen, p. 41), realizing that writing about an experience is not the same as the experience itself. The aim is to reflect on and make the lived experience visible to the researcher and to others.

The phenomenon of interest in this study was the first full year of the school's operation as experienced by myself, a veteran American school teacher and university teacher educator that helped organize and direct the school. Examining this year-long experience involved organizing and analyzing information from several sources, including laws and regulations, meeting minutes and notes, records of daily and weekly school business, personal written accounts of local customs and traditions, and my journal entries that included conversations with school committee members, teachers, parents, and students. I organized these data chronologically and according to my insight into their role within the experience.

Once the various data were organized the next step was to read and reread them, and to extract themes that exemplified the topic of establishing and directing the school in its first year. Themes condensed from lived experience are a means to make sense of the phenomenon and to write about it in such a way as to inform others (Manen, 1990). For example, the process of obtaining government recognition was addressed by researching the requirements in government documents, discussing the appropriate level of recognition in school committee meetings, soliciting opinions from teachers, reacting to parent concerns in monthly parent meetings, and requesting clarification from district and state-level officials. I extracted these data from school committee and parent meeting minutes and notes, and from journal entries. Explaining the experience based on these sources allows me to make the process visible to myself and others.

Themes can be seen as parts of the whole phenomenon of establishing and directing the school. The themes are reported here as general considerations with the attendant lessons learned that may be of interest to others engaging in similar work.

Results and Discussion

Learning and following the procedures for organizing and directing the school during the

first full year were instructive experiences for me. These experiences are condensed here into six considerations for establishing an English-medium school in south India: i.e., government recognition, school governance, school culture, teacher hiring and development, English-medium instruction, and parent/family relations. Each consideration begins with a statement from the law or research literature to define or clarify the topic. This is followed by a description of the phenomenon and then an explanation of the lessons that I learned as the school program came to fruition.

Government recognition

The first consideration is obtaining government recognition. Schools must obtain recognition for students to be eligible for government examinations in standards 10 and 12. Recognition is equivalent to accreditation, but it is granted by the state government rather than by independent accrediting bodies, as in the U.S. Schools in Tamil Nadu are established according to specific state government regulations. These regulations require that the school's physical facilities be safe, sanitary, and adequate for instruction. They describe requirements for admitting and withdrawing students, setting hours in the school day and days in the school year, establishing faculty and staff qualifications and employment policies, and disciplining students. The regulations also define financial procedures and the structure and responsibilities of school governance (C. Sitaraman, 2007).

Issues faced by Rising Star. Deciding which level of recognition would be appropriate for the Peery School was an important early decision. The basic level of recognition is state board, the common level for government schools, which at the time that Rising Star applied for recognition required Tamil-medium instruction. The next level is matriculation, common to many private schools, which at the time required English-medium instruction (Government of Tamil Nadu, Directorate of Matriculation Schools, 2005). Rising Star's decision to offer an English-medium curriculum meant that matriculation was appropriate for the Peery School. However, a new state ordinance enacted in late 2009 changed the regulations to provide that schools with any level of recognition may use any language for

instruction, other than for language classes, but must implement the new state-mandated uniform curriculum across all types of schools by the year 2012 (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2009a).

Recognition application forms and procedures are fixed by regulation, as are the preliminary certifications that must be in place when the application is submitted. These certifications include building soundness, as verified by a structural engineer; certification of the waste and sanitation system, as provided by a local government sanitation official; and compliance with the fire code, as certified by a local fire official's inspection (C. Sitaraman, 2007). Building adequacy for curricular requirements of the Peery School, such as library facilities, science labs, and playground space, was verified by photographs and descriptions submitted with the application. The review process at various levels of local and state government took several months, but recognition for the school was eventually granted.

Lessons learned. The two lessons I learned about obtaining government recognition were to avoid paying bribes and to recruit local support for the school. Both of these became essential to the success of the school and Rising Star's legitimate presence in the area.

Avoid bribery. This and other Rising Star endeavors showed that it is possible and advisable to circumvent the custom of bribery. Navigating state and local bureaucratic procedures can be daunting for a foreign entity, especially in a culture of financial inducement, but Rising Star decided at the outset not to pay bribes at any level for three reasons. First, the founders believe that using donated funds to pay bribes is unfair to the individuals and organizations donating money to help the needy. Second, if a person or entity pays a bribe, then a bribe is often expected at every step thereafter. Third, providing financial inducement to a person in authority makes it possible for the authority figure to expose the bribe payer unless further money is paid on demand (Becky Douglas, personal communication, November 10, 2010).

Many local people speculated that Rising Star would be unable to conduct business without providing financial inducement, but this has not been the case. Sometimes when

individuals or authorities have come to understand the mission of Rising Star—realizing that it provides direct benefit to children and families without profit—hearts have softened and doors have opened. At other times, Rising Star has called on friendly locals for assistance, or has simply pursued higher legal channels. Over time Rising Star has built a reputation for engaging in important work without providing financial inducement, which seems to validate the viewpoint that staying above reproach is the best policy in the long run (Becky Douglas, personal communication, November 10, 2010).

Recruit local support. A second lesson learned was the necessity of having prominent local support. As is often the case in a developing area, it is essential to have a group of influential local people involved. Rising Star set out early to meet and recruit people of stature to fulfill this need, including high level government retirees with established networks of influence, such as representatives from the Indian Administrative Service and the Tamil Nadu Education Directorate. These friends were asked to serve on the organization's Indian Board of Directors, and they in turn introduced Rising Star to business leaders, service organizations like Rotary International, and leaders in other private schools.

Each of these contacts has been integral to the success of the program. In obtaining school recognition, a retired state-level education officer on the board did much to make the application move more smoothly than otherwise possible. The network established by the directors also makes it easier to recruit new members to serve on the board as terms of service expire.

School governance

The second consideration faced by the Peery School was to understand school governance. The system of school governance in Tamil Nadu is explicitly detailed in state regulations. Education is under the direction of the state ministerial-level Department of School Education, which is subdivided into various secretaries and undersecretaries for different aspects of direction and supervision (Akila, 2009). Governance at the local level is provided by the school committee and the school principal. The school committee is responsible for hiring and disciplining the

principal, faculty, and staff; for establishing school policies; and for approving the budget.

Issues at Peery School. When the Peery School was established, the regulations required that school committee membership consist of six representatives of the educational agency, meaning the organization that owns and administers the school; three senior teachers; one parent representative; and one senior non-teaching staff member, all of whom serve for three years and are eligible for further terms. The principal sits as an ex officio member. One of the educational agency representatives acts as secretary for the school committee to keep meeting minutes and to oversee school financial accounts (C. Sitaraman, 2007).

The principal is responsible for day-to-day school operations within the scope of available resources. The principal's duties include supervising teachers, maintaining teacher attendance and other records, reviewing lesson plans, granting teacher leave, overseeing teacher payroll, and conducting examinations. In addition, the principal is to facilitate collaboration among teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to ensure the quality of the school's educational program (Government of Tamil Nadu, Department of School Education, n. d.). The principal is assisted by staff members as necessary to carry out daily school operations.

Since the time that the Peery School received recognition India has enacted *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act* (Government of India, 2009). The draft regulations for the Act in Tamil Nadu propose significant changes to the school committee, including the title, membership, roles of members, and duties of the committee (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2009b).

Lessons learned. School governance helped me learn the importance of a clear mission and the need for accountability for student achievement. These lessons affect both the overall concept of the school and the day-to-day instructional program.

A clear mission. The first lesson I learned was that the school must establish a vision and mission that all parties understand and accept. People generally understand how a school works as a result of their own experiences and as part of their cultural upbringing, but the various players at the Peery School had

differing ideas about what the school should be and do. For example, some parents wanted their daughters to learn homemaking and craft skills that would prepare them for marriage and family life. Other parents wanted the school to prepare their children for admission to a college or university. Teachers also varied in their opinions. Most saw their instructional role as preparing students with memorized information for traditional exams, while a few pressed for more exploration and creativity in the classroom. The second principal, a local educator who replaced me in that position after seven months, differed from the teachers regarding the instructional language of the school. She expected teachers to provide a rich language environment by speaking English exclusively, but most of the teachers had scarcely mastered the rudiments of conversational English. The faculty thought the best approach was to teach for understanding using Tamil and then infuse as much English as possible.

These various opinions became extraneous when the board of directors specified the school's mission as an English-medium school providing matriculation curriculum. This decision gave the school committee and principal a specific reference framework from which to set policy, direct the use of resources, supervise and evaluate teachers, and communicate with parents. A well-articulated mission supported by a comprehensive policy framework is essential for avoiding confusion and for minimizing the programmatic and procedural drift that can occur in a less well grounded organization.

Accountability for student achievement.

The second lesson learned was that the school must have a strong system of accountability for measuring and reporting student achievement. Indian schools have long utilized a system of regular examinations to assess students on memorized information, including quarterly, half-yearly, and annual exams, with midterm exams before each of these. Marks on examinations reflect directly on the teachers and the overall school, so there can be a tendency to inflate scores in one or more ways. For example, some teachers created their tests and then taught the exact test items rather than preparing students with generally similar items. Other teachers reviewed students' responses during the test period and either directed them to change

answers or gave them more than the allotted time to complete the exam. When the Indian principal learned that some teachers were using such tactics, she informed them that this was unacceptable and subsequently supervised exam preparation and administration more closely. As a result later test scores were markedly lower than earlier ones for some teachers, but probably more accurate.

Accurate achievement data are essential for evaluating a school's curriculum and instruction (Halverson et al., 2007; Prew & Quagrain, 2010). I learned that accurately measuring and reporting learning outcomes may not put the school in a favorable light at first, but it certainly provides more reliable information for making needed improvements over time. Accurate data lead to informed decisions, and informed decisions lead to improved outcomes. This is essential in the developmental stages of a new school and for continuous improvement in an established school.

School culture

The third consideration for establishing a school is the influence of local school culture, particularly if an education agency desires to offer an innovative program. A general overview of culture and tradition is presented here, followed by discussion of its influence on school and school change in India.

Issues in traditional Indian school culture. Tradition in school culture is a powerful force, one that resists change and is often intolerant of innovation (Levin, 2001), especially regarding teaching philosophies and instructional methods transmitted from one generation of teachers to the next. Teachers' traditional beliefs and attitudes are a synthesis of their experiences as pupils, their preservice teacher training, and their professional experience—all of which are shaped by local conventions and broader societal norms (Dyer et al., 2004). The advantage of school tradition is that stability and predictability foster an institutional identity that helps maintain expectations. The disadvantage is that ingrained tradition militates against change for improvement (Levin, 2001). Tradition is as influential in Indian school culture as in any other setting, and it should be studied and carefully considered by those endeavoring to establish a school.

Instruction. Those establishing a new school in India need to be aware that each state

approves and provides the syllabi, examinations, teaching suggestions, and sometimes the texts and materials for the various levels of school curriculum, which tends to instill uniformity of practice and impede change (Rajput, Tewari & Kumar, 2005). Also, most schools still use methods for memorized exam preparation that date back to the British colonial system (Kumar, 2005), even though the long tradition of rote learning is increasingly challenged by appeals for and experiments with more creative child-centered teaching and learning activities (Clarke, 2003; Raghavan, 2007). Teachers tend to believe that substantive change from current teaching methods to more activity-based and experiential approaches will be difficult or impossible if attempted within the existing examination system (Dyer et al., 2004).

Teacher responsibility. A high rate of teacher absenteeism is another important issue that seems rooted in Indian school culture. A study of 3700 schools in 20 states revealed an average daily teacher absentee rate of 25% (range =15-45%) across government and private primary and secondary schools in urban and rural areas (Kremer et al., 2004). In addition, the study found that teacher education, teacher experience, higher salary, and prestigious assignment within the school, such as the position of head teacher, did not improve attendance. Perhaps a more ominous finding was that during three unannounced visits to each school during the study, an average of only 45% of teachers were actively engaged in teaching their students (Kremer et al., 2004). This contrasts sharply with a western view of employee responsibility for attendance and productivity.

Worldviews. Perhaps the most impactful aspect of school culture is the difference between eastern and western thought, specifically between Indian and American worldviews. Clarke (2001) presents four constructs that seem to guide Indian thinking: (a) the acceptance of regulation as essential to an interdependent society, (b) the imperative of duty above individual choice as an extension of the concept of caste, (c) the supremacy of teachers over students in terms of knowledge and entitlement to respect, and (d) the importance of collective rather than individual interpretation of knowledge. Clarke (2003) relates these constructs to Shweder's

(1991) work categorizing Indian society as duty based, emphasizing responsibility to the group or community, in contrast to American society's rights-based preference for individual growth and freedom. These differing worldviews suggest that Indian school culture may be incompatible with western views of education, especially those that advocate independence, individual achievement, and creative thinking over duty to society and the collective good (Singal, 2007).

The differences in educational worldviews are evident with the increasing number of international corporations establishing offices and facilities in India. Recruiting Indian university graduates for corporate employment has exposed the incongruity between Indian education and the requirements of the global workplace. For example, in two annual job fairs held on the campus of the University of Madras in Chennai, only 9,000 of 60,000 candidates were selected for employment. The remainder were deemed unprepared due to lack of "soft skills," such as training for leadership (Special Correspondent, 2008a). Vice Chancellor S. Ramachandran noted that although India produces millions of graduates each year, very few receive a quality education that prepares them for employment in today's workplace (Special Correspondent, 2008b).

Government recognition brought the Peery School under the purview of matriculation curriculum, and the principal and teachers are well schooled in the tradition of exam preparation. However, Rising Star has a broader vision for its students, one that will produce fluent English speakers and prepare them for postsecondary education in a global economy. Accomplishing this will likely require more modern and westernized approaches to teaching and learning than traditional Indian education provides. Therefore, mediating between two educational philosophies is a crucial consideration as the school sets its path to the future.

Lessons learned. Working with local school culture yielded lessons about the durability of traditional instructional practice and the effectiveness of teacher incentive pay for promoting teacher responsibility. I learned that tradition in teaching is powerful, and that new ideas about teacher responsibility are not easily accepted.

Traditional instructional practice. The first lesson I learned was that locally recruited administrators and teachers carry their pedagogical constructs with them, and this can weigh heavily against a paradigm shift should a school's founders desire to try something new. For example, I introduced a participatory approach to teaching English language speaking, reading, and writing that included teacher modeling with high rates of student response, praise to reinforce correct student responses, immediate corrective feedback for incorrect responses, and group and individual speaking, reading, and writing practice to mastery criteria, including reading a new book each week. The students responded enthusiastically and made good progress for six weeks, but when the school applied for matriculation recognition the Indian principal ended the program because it took valuable time away from traditional test preparation. Instructional methods did not change, even with inservice instruction and explicit expectations for teachers to incorporate more activity-based learning.

Even though the explicit approach is well validated by research and practice in the U. S. (Carnine, Silber, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2004; Kim & Axelrod, 2005; Torgesen, 2002), the Peery School teachers had no evidence from their own experiences to convince them that such an approach was a good use of instructional time. It seems that short-term expectations centered in the existing system were too powerful to permit consideration of probable long-term gains. In the end, the looming specter of government examinations inhibited the faculty and administration from embracing a new approach. In the future, infusing new methods into the existing instructional model will require some way to convince local administrators and teachers that the experiment will not jeopardize examination results.

Teacher incentive pay. The second lesson learned was that teacher responsibility can be influenced by adopting a performance pay scheme in which a portion of monthly salaries is tied to itemized contractual expectations. There is some mention in research literature of this type of scheme in Indian schools. Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2006) linked improved test scores to teacher performance pay in an experimental trial in rural government schools, and Kingdon and Teal

(2007) found improved test scores in some private schools, but the practice is not part of the traditional school system. In contrast, many American schools use merit pay plans to reward teacher improvement (Hunter, 2010) and merit pay is common practice in American business (Aquila, 2010). The Peery School instituted the performance pay scheme as an experiment in using American incentive tactics to promote desired improvements in teacher conduct.

The performance pay system provided a set equal amount for all teachers, but differences in teachers' salaries due to variance in education and experience meant that the amount varied from one-third to one-fifth of individual teachers' pay. The school established ten expectations that each represented 10% of the performance portion of salaries:

- Attend all contract days
- Follow policy for arranging leave
- Stay with assigned class, do not leave class unattended
- Submit quality lesson plans to principal each Friday
- Implement teaching skills learned in training
- Use activity-based learning when possible
- Maintain orderly classroom environment
- Employ positive classroom behavior supports
- Maintain and submit accurate student records
- Follow all other Peery School policies

Each of the expectations was defined in a document given to teachers that listed specific indicators for each item. For example, under "Employ positive classroom behavior supports" the indicators included

- teacher avoids using physical punishment,
- children obey classroom rules,
- children are attentive and on task, and
- children use the verandah pass to leave classroom.

As principal for the first seven months, I monitored compliance through direct observation and review of applicable documents and records. After each monthly confidential performance review with each teacher, I determined the portion of

performance pay each had earned and then submitted the signed evaluation forms to the financial manager in advance of the monthly pay date.

Data collected from the performance review documents and teacher attendance records indicated significant improvements in some areas that probably resulted from the scheme. For example, corporal punishment was greatly reduced or eliminated, and incidents of teachers leaving their classes unsupervised declined sharply. In addition, Peery School teacher absenteeism averaged about 2% for the 2008-2009 school year, including approved leave time and medical emergencies, while the national study reported an average of 25% (Kremer et al., 2004). This is significant in that the national study found higher absenteeism in rural areas, and the Peery School is situated in a rural setting several kilometers from the nearest bus route, with the majority of teachers commuting daily.

Differing world views about teacher incentive pay. As principal, I was comfortable with the performance pay scheme, but the Indian principal who came later in the school year could not bring herself to evaluate the teachers when doing so involved their pay. Likewise, the Indian teachers were strongly opposed to the scheme. Cultural differences were again evident: the teachers and the Indian principal were not accustomed to being held responsible to the extent of affecting monthly pay. Consequently, I, acting as assistant to the new principal continued the evaluations and performance reviews for the remainder of the school year at the principal's request.

Teacher hiring and development

India seems to have a ready supply of teacher candidates, except for those who teach individuals with disabilities (Indo Asian News Service, 2010). However, not all teachers are willing to work for a startup private school, and they are not all well prepared to step into an English-medium learning environment. In addition, some applicants to the Peery School may have had initial concerns about contracting leprosy, but when assured that none of the students have the disease, that it is difficult to contract, and that it is readily treated if contracted, the concerns dissolved.

Teacher hiring. Teachers earnestly seek government school appointments because salaries are generally higher than in private schools (Kingdon & Teal, 2007). However,

appointment to a government school requires candidates to pass a competitive examination and to be placed on a seniority-based waiting list until a position is available (Thangamthenarasu, 2010). The wait is often several years; therefore many teach in private schools until a government position is assigned. This is a viable employment option in Tamil Nadu where private institutions comprise nearly 35% of recognized schools (National University of Education Planning and Administration, 2011).

The purpose of teacher recruitment is to find and hire qualified teachers. The *Code of Regulations for Matriculation Schools* in Tamil Nadu requires teachers to have certain levels of education and training. For example, an elementary teacher must have completed secondary school and must have earned a Trained Teacher's Certificate Elementary Grade or its equivalent. Principals must have earned a B.A. or B.Sc. and a B.Ed. with a Trained Teacher's Certificate to Collegiate Grade, and must have taught at least five years in a recognized school (Sitaraman, 2007). Candidates provide notarized documents as evidence of their suitability when interviewing for positions, and schools are required to maintain files with each teacher's current credentials and other evidence of qualification.

The Peery School actively recruited teacher candidates through Rising Star employee connections, newspaper advertisements, and television spots. When school started in June 2008, eight teachers were employed from the previous year's efforts to conduct school before the Peery School was established. Four positions were still open when school started, but all were filled within one month. Although the school was a new establishment in a rural area, enough candidates applied that the school had a reserve of one to three applications for each teaching position except English by the middle of the school year. Two teachers left during the school year, and these places were filled from the application reserve.

Teacher development. Teacher development, or providing inservice education to improve teachers' skills and knowledge, is meant to stimulate change and improvement in schools (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). As common as teacher development activities are, there is much discussion in both the U. S. and India

about whether or not such training actually engenders changes in teacher behavior that improve student learning and behavioral outcomes (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2003; Kremer et al., 2004). India established District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) in 1986 to bring teacher development activities closer to local schools and teachers. However, research in one state indicates that few DIETs have developed means of measuring the impact of training on student achievement (Dyer et al., 2004; Dyer, 2005). Likewise, most research in the U.S. focuses on teachers' self-reported satisfaction with training rather than measuring the effects of specific practices on student learning (Rodrigues, 2010).

Teacher development was an ongoing pursuit during the Peery School's first year. Dissatisfaction with teaching and learning in temporary quarters before the school building was completed caused the founders to recruit me, an American educator, to bring order to the program. Part of the plan when the building was completed was to address what the founders considered to be inadequate and inappropriate curriculum and instruction. As an experienced American public school teacher and university educator with a degree in educational administration, I agreed to spend one year working at the school to address this and other issues. Rising Star asked me to serve as principal until a local principal could be hired and to train the teachers to use more activity-based, student-friendly approaches to learning. With no knowledge of India or Indian school culture, except for what was available in research literature, I prepared inservice modules on several topics, including basic learning theory, effects of positive reinforcement on learning and behavior, and lesson planning guided by daily measureable learning objectives. Three weeks after arriving in India I met the teachers and conducted in-service training for several days before school started.

Lessons learned. I learned lessons concerning a variety of issues. The most striking were about levels of language skill, acceptance of authority, and the impact of incongruent school philosophies.

Levels of language skill. The first lesson I learned was that the native Tamil-speaking teachers' beliefs about their English skills did not match their actual facility with the language. While conducting inservice training,

I soon realized that the teachers varied so much in their English skills that effective dialogue about the practice of teaching was nearly impossible. Except for the very fluent English teacher, the teachers either answered questions with halting, incorrect English, or did not answer at all. Upon reviewing the teachers' hiring documents, I found that they had done well in required English classes, but the assumption that this prepared them to converse in English was unfounded. It was evident that doing well in school course work did not indicate ability to communicate with a native speaker. Therefore, I learned that employment interviews should include sufficient conversation about a wide range of topics to accurately assess candidates' readiness to discuss teaching, learning, and course content in English.

Acceptance of authority. The second lesson learned was that the teachers would not question, debate, or discuss anything I said, even when they seemed to understand it and were invited to do so in their native language. This made it difficult for me to know what the teachers were thinking, and seemed to support outsiders' assertions that "they tell you what they think you want to hear." I felt out of place because of past experience with vociferous American teachers and the expectation that they would discuss, seek clarification, and offer opinions about any issues brought before them. The Peery School teachers' behavior appeared to be a manifestation of customary Indian submission to administrative direction and the perspective of duty over individual choice, as described by Clarke (2001). It seemed to be just what the teachers learned as students in school: to be told what to do, and not to discuss or question the matter.

However, a second explanation may be that unfamiliarity contributed to teacher reticence. Over several months of daily contact the teachers became more open to sharing opinions and discussing teaching methods with me. Therefore, initial teacher reluctance may have resulted from having an unknown individual from a foreign country introduced as the new principal and then having that individual present new concepts in a barely intelligible language. If this was the case, then cultural understanding and comfortable interpersonal relationships seem

to be important factors in effective communication.

Incongruent school philosophies. The third lesson I learned derives from the aforementioned consideration of school culture. Teachers are unlikely to understand or readily accept ideas about teaching and learning that are incongruent with their social mores and school traditions. Therefore, non-native school founders and educators should take ample time and opportunity to learn about and experience local school culture before planning or initiating teacher development for change.

A case in point was the founders' desire to eliminate the use of corporal punishment and verbal castigation to control student behavior. My experience with positive classroom interactions seemed to be just the answer to these concerns. Positive classroom interactions include helpful, proactive measures that teach and reinforce desirable behaviors rather than administering aversive consequences to punish undesirable behaviors. I assumed that given the option, any caring adult would embrace a nurturing management style using praise and encouragement rather than a controlling style with physical consequence and harsh reprimand. This was not the case at the Peery School, but I came to realize that it did not mean the teachers were uncaring. It meant that they were using methods they had experienced as students and observed as teachers. They were acting according to their cultural understanding, for which the extreme position was presented by one nonteaching staff member who stated unabashedly that "children will not learn obedience unless they know fear."

The differences between Indian and American thought exemplify again the importance of understanding a culture before attempting to alter practice. I decided that given another opportunity, I would insist on observing in local schools for an entire school year before taking the helm to initiate change. During the year I would study school routines, compare routines between public and private schools, differentiate between cultural and idiosyncratic teacher behaviors, and decide what innovations would most likely succeed. I would then use this information to plan for incremental change.

English-medium instruction

Rising Star decided at the beginning to provide all instruction in English, except for Tamil studies, in order to help students learn and master English as a key to upward mobility. Even though most Indians do not speak English, it is actually the lingua franca in a nation that recognizes 22 regional languages (Government of India, 2007) and speaks hundreds of other major and minor tongues (Mishra & Stainthorp, 2007). English is also the language of higher education and commerce in India, and it has become the international language for aviation, sports, science, technology and other global pursuits (Ramanathan & Bruning, 2002). Consequently, an English-language education is a key to success for modern Indians as they prepare for careers at the local, national and international levels (Dherem, 2005; Ramanathan, 2008). Rising Star believes that children with a sound English-language education are more likely than children without such education to transcend the stigma of leprosy in their personal lives and achieve success in their educational and professional pursuits. To provide this level of education, the Peery School might benefit from lessons learned in studies of English-language learning in the U.S.

An important language learning distinction. English-language learning in the U.S. distinguishes between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979). Children can gain BICS in a few years of social immersion at school and play, but CALP, or academic and technical language proficiency, takes much longer (Collier, 1987). U.S. schools have realized that a student's BICS is not a valid indicator of readiness for academic learning, and that CALP requires diligent instruction and application (Cummins, 1999). It is possible to become proficient at CALP without gaining BICS, as when individuals spend years learning to read and write an academic language in which they have little or no opportunity to converse (Cummins, 1999).

BICS and CALP provide a useful structure within which to view English teaching in India. Instruction in government schools emphasizes the "library language" skills of reading and writing, with little work on spoken fluency (Ramanathan, 2008, p. 114). This

traditional approach emphasizes CALP at the expense of BICS, meaning that students are expected to master academic applications of the language with little or no conversational fluency. This was evident in the Peery School when the English teacher assigned students to memorize poems or brief addresses in English and then recite them or write them on examinations. Although many students eventually memorized the sounds, words, and spellings, they seldom understood the message conveyed. Lacking spoken English skills, the students simply memorized form without meaning. This memorization is no longer enough because opportunities for today's Indians require fluency in spoken as well as written English (Nickerson, 2008). BICS is as important as CALP in the 21st century, but school practice in rural India has not kept pace.

Lessons learned. I learned lessons about the importance of English language immersion in school and about opportunities for English conversation outside the classroom. These experiences are likely to be common in any school that introduces a second-language curriculum in a rural setting.

English language immersion. The first lesson I learned was that simply establishing an English-medium school and providing English-language textbooks does not mean that students will learn to read, write, and speak English. Peery School students do not have the advantages of living at home with English-speaking families that many Indian students enjoy in middle- and upper-class urban settings. Therefore, helping students master spoken and written English requires immersion in fluent English environments that feature high rates of modeling and sufficient opportunities for accurate practice in both BICS and CALP. This requires English-speaking teachers.

Hiring fluent speakers is a difficult endeavor for the Peery School because it requires enticing licensed teachers with excellent spoken English to locate or commute to a rural area at salaries much lower than government schools provide. Rising Star has considered inviting American teachers to spend a year at the school in either teaching or co-teaching roles, but this has not been productive. Newly-licensed teachers in the U.S. are anxious to begin their careers in local districts with the attendant medical and

retirement benefits, and experienced teachers are often locked into the system for the same reasons. Teaching in India for a year might require teachers to resign their positions and start over upon their return.

The school is also investigating distance education via the internet as a way for students to interact with English speakers in America or elsewhere. Other options may come, but providing fluent English-language modeling and instruction will likely be the primary challenge for any group endeavoring to establish a school in similar conditions.

Opportunities for English conversation. The second lesson learned was that opportunities for English conversation outside of school are helpful. The Peery School accomplishes this by hosting English-speaking summer volunteers, largely college students who serve for two to four weeks during the months of June, July and August. Their time is evenly divided between service projects in local leprosy colonies and one-to-one English instruction with students. In this way, students receive 30 minutes of instruction and conversation twice each week for three months. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this program has done more for improving student BICS than any other part of their schooling. In addition, the informal conversation between volunteers and students outside of school hours is most likely helpful, but the true effects are difficult to estimate or measure.

Parent/family relations

Peery Matriculation School is not an orphanage, but the directors believe that the long-lasting societal effects of leprosy require that students leave their homes and live on campus if they are to break the cycle of discrimination by association. This arrangement obviously presents concerns for parents and family members as they relinquish their accustomed daily involvement with their children. Children can also experience some separation anxiety, but this abates as they become familiar with other children and their caregivers, and as they greet returning friends. All children return to their homes from the end of school in April until the new session commences around the first of June, and they also return home for two brief school holidays.

Family considerations at Peery School. Overall, parents seem to understand and accept the advantages of their children's unique educational opportunities, of which family

separation is a necessary part. They are aware that an English-language education can provide advantages that many other rural and disadvantaged children do not enjoy.

Advantages of residential schooling. There are advantages to a well designed and efficient residential school program. Access to quality education is Rising Star's primary concern, but evidence from research in Asia shows that residential schools can promote gender equity, provide security for girls, address health and medical concerns, meet the nutritional needs of children, enhance social skills, and promote mainstreaming of marginalized children into broader society (Bista & Cosstick, 2005). Living in communal hostels with adult supervisors also provides opportunities to establish routines that teach and reinforce desirable personal and social behaviors and responsibilities that would normally be taught at home. For example, children at the Peery School all take part in regular housekeeping and grounds maintenance tasks that are culturally appropriate for their age and gender, such as laundry, cleanup after meals, sweeping and mopping, litter cleanup, and gardening chores. Students also take turns working in groups to sweep and straighten their classrooms at the end of each day, and to keep the school property tidy.

Family involvement. Rising Star strives to be very sensitive to the feelings of parents and families while their children are at school. This required devising ways to maintain family ties while children live away from their homes. Consequently, Parent Day is held on the first Saturday of each month, allowing families time to visit their children and to conference with the teachers about academic progress. In addition, parents are allowed to bring or send new clothes for their children's birthdays so they can maintain the tradition of wearing "colors" instead of school uniforms in honor of the day.

Lessons learned. I learned two important lessons regarding relations with families: the importance of transparent school admission policies and the need to avoid engendering a sense of entitlement in the children.

School admission. The first lesson came about as the school committee established a system of priority admissions based on each child's relationship with a leprosy-affected relative. Children whose parents have active

leprosy with disfigurement and cannot work were assigned priority A, those whose grandparents have active leprosy with disfigurement and cannot work were assigned priority B, and those whose parents or grandparents have leprosy without disfigurement and are able to work were assigned priority C. The school committee made admission decisions at the end of the school year for the following year, but parents complained that they didn't understand why some children were admitted while some from the same colony were not. The school committee realized that the confusion resulted from failure to regularize the procedures for informing parents about which children were accepted and why. The committee addressed the issue by convening a Parents Day meeting to clearly explain the priority admissions policy and to answer parents' questions. The committee then revised its posting procedure to produce a document listing all admissions for the next year, and to make it available to families on the final Parents Day of the school year. This transparent procedure makes it possible to address any admission decision parents might appeal with clear information available to both parties.

Entitlement vs. responsibility. The second lesson I learned was that when students attend school without fees and are provided room, board, and school supplies free of charge they tend to develop a sense of entitlement rather than respect for materials and property. For example, students were so cavalier in their care of notebooks and pencils that the office secretary spent a significant portion of her time distributing new supplies. By the middle of the school week the ground around the classroom windows would be littered with half-used notebooks, crumpled papers, and even textbooks; and the supply budget dwindled faster than anticipated. Likewise, children's sandals, underwear, and sometimes outer clothing were often scattered around the residential hostels, laundry areas, and clotheslines.

The residential staff and I implemented several unsuccessful strategies to counteract this tendency among the children. The first approach was to lecture the students in morning school assemblies and evening hostel meetings. This was unsuccessful, so the adult leaders then assigned hostel teams to gather the items regularly and have all the children go

through them to claim their own. Likewise, I assigned school classes to pick up litter on the school grounds on a rotating basis. This method helped tidy the various areas, but did not seem to change the problem behavior. Then the school secretary started limiting pencils and pens to one per student per month. This helped, but some students actually needed more pencils or paper because of their diligent work, and it was difficult for the secretary to know which students really needed and deserved the additional supplies. Finally, I took the issue to the directors and the school committee.

The board of directors and school committee discussed the problem and devised a fee system that was financially reasonable for the colony families and would motivate the students to learn careful stewardship for materials and property. Regular school fees are not allowed according to the school's matriculation recognition as a non-fee school. But the school began requiring a "cautionary deposit" from each family at the beginning of the school year in the amount of Rs.1000 (about \$20 U.S.). These funds are kept in an account from which payment can be deducted for damages or wasted school supplies. Students then meet regularly with the school secretary to review the status of their account. At the end of each school year unused funds are deposited in a savings account for each student, to be refunded upon completion of 12th Standard.

The aim of the cautionary deposit scheme is threefold. First, students must understand that things cost money, and that there is not an endless supply of funds. Second, they must understand the limitations of their parents' financial circumstances and the careful stewardship of resources. Third, the students will gain some sense of financial planning by annually reviewing the savings account and eventually planning for its use. This also provides the school with a vehicle for teaching and reinforcing the rudiments of financial literacy.

Conclusion

I learned much in the first full year of Rising Star's efforts to establish an English-medium school for children from leprosy colonies in south India. Lessons learned in the areas of government recognition, school governance, school culture, teacher hiring and development, English-medium instruction, and

parent/family relations have been beneficial to the Peery School, and may serve as examples to others who are endeavoring to establish schools for marginalized populations. It is reasonable to assume that Rising Star will continue to refine its school program, as any group involved in a similar activity should expect to do. In the end, the goal is to provide valuable educational opportunities to children and their families who might otherwise go without.

Author Bio

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