

Within High Schools - - Influences on Retention among the Indigenous People of Northeast India

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BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of

Educational Administration and Higher Education

Educational Administration

**WITHIN HIGH SCHOOLS - - INFLUENCES ON RETENTION AMONG THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF NORTHEAST INDIA**

Dissertation

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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**WITHIN-SCHOOL INFLUENCES ON RETENTION AMONG
INDIGENOUS STUDENTS OF NORTHEAST INDIA**

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Abstract

A qualitative case study of three high schools was conducted to identify and profile school practices employed in educating a traditionally low-achieving subpopulation in northeast India. By the considerably higher than average retention and graduation rates among their students who come from indigenous tribal communities, these schools stand out as effective. The study was centered on the following research questions: 1) What were the teaching practices that characterize three high schools with successful records of graduating (upwards of 100%) indigenous Northeast India tribal students? 2) How were these successful schools affected by the school leadership?

A body of related literature provided the theoretical rationale and informed the researcher in collecting data, doing analysis, and processing interpretation. The researcher reviewed specific categories of literature focused on the following: dropout influences, effective teaching practices, school leadership, indigenous tribal life contexts, spirituality, and worldview of the peoples of Northeast India.

The findings indicated that these three schools with low dropout rates reflected authentic and effective teaching practices that were student-friendly and based on a coherent mix of various principles of learning, instructional strategies, classroom management, and the personal dedication of the teaching faculties.

Furthermore, the schools tried to create an atmosphere of social connectedness and community, based on the values of the indigenous people of that area. The school leadership was proactive in an effort to sustain the sense of community through a variety of school activities and cooperation with parents. The researcher found that the ethos of the schools motivated students to focus on their studies in view of a better economic future. A contextualized pedagogy that took into account the background and learning styles of a wide variety of students helped the students to focus on their learning in the various academic disciplines. Pedagogical practices that promoted academic achievement in concert with indigenous values sustained the interest of the students and moved them to actively involve themselves in the life of the school. The leadership provided the necessary vision and direction to make the objectives and goals of the school understood and obtainable. The visible presence of the principal and his/her affirming interaction also helped to maintain the motivation of the community on all levels of operation. The findings of this research have implications for educational practice, policy, teacher preparation and school leadership in the context of rural India.

Dedication

Rev. Victor Crasta, C.S.C.

A life offered for peace and education

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ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. May Brahman protect us both!

May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of Knowledge!

May we both obtain the energy to acquire Knowledge!

May we both study to reveal the Truth!

May we cherish no ill feeling toward each other!

Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

Katha Upanishad

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

Introduction

This study is prompted by a 79 % dropout rate among the indigenous people of northeast India as reported in the selected educational statistics of 2004 -2005 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2007). Nevertheless some schools in this region stand out as successful schools that are effective in working with the indigenous tribal children of northeast India. This is evidenced by their considerably higher than average rate of retention of these children. The study will attempt to identify and profile the characteristics of teaching practices used by the teachers in a sample of three schools in educating a traditionally very low-achieving subpopulation in rural India. The presumption is that good teaching practices and school leadership have an overall effect on student retention.

This chapter will present the focus of the study, its significance, a brief history of education in India, the theoretical rationale behind this study, the two major research questions, the overall research design, and definition of some terms. With this overview of the study, chapter two will present the review of relevant literature.

Focus of the Study

Some schools stand out as successful schools that are effective in working with the indigenous tribal children of Northeast India. This research will focus on three schools in the northeast region of India, which are known for their higher retention rates and graduation success with indigenous students. The presumption is that the consistently good practices of teaching, school leadership, and a strong school culture have an effect

on student retention. Based on research of variables in effective schools elsewhere, the impact of which improved student learning, this research will consider the following components within an educational environment: teacher interaction with students, individually and in groups; early intervention with underperforming or troubled students; management of classroom discipline; the use of relevant curriculum and a repertory of pedagogical techniques; consistent assessment of student learning; and significant engagement among students in after- school activities.

This region has a distinct geographical structure and diverse ethnic population with its own concomitant socio-economic base of development (Malhotra & Mittal, 2000). Northeast India consists of the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura. The total population of the region is 42,000,000 (Census of India, 2001). This region of India lies deep in the lap of the easternmost Himalayan Hills, in the northeastern part of India. Connected to the rest of India by merely 20 km of borderland (at Siliguri, West Bengal), Northeast India shares over 2,000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh (www.north-east-india.com).

Shockingly, a 79% dropout rate is reported among the tribal students of this area in grades one to ten. (Selected Educational Statistics 2004 -2005). The Annual Report of 2005-06 (Human resource ministry, 2008) reveals the following dropout rates among tribal students; Assam 76.94%, Manipur 78.98%, Meghalaya 86.67%, Mizoram 69.55%, Nagaland 67.33%, and Tripura 86.47%. The study will focus on three high schools that are imparting quality education, particularly for indigenous people of this region, two in Meghalaya and one in Nagaland.

Significance of the Study

The retention rates in many states of India are somewhere between 60% to 92%, whereas the retention rate among the indigenous people is lower than 30%. Research on the dropout phenomenon in many countries indicates two major sources of influence, one exterior to the school and one interior to the school. Exterior influences include poverty, family reliance on young people working, early pregnancy, flight from violence and warfare, and family chaos (Fetler, 1989; Johnson et. al., 2001; Myers, Kim, & Mandala, 2004; Suh & Suh, 2007; Stewart, 2008). Interior influences include poor teaching, early and consistent failing grades, repressive authoritarian culture, and a disconnect between the school and the local community (Chitty, 2006; Gross, 1990; Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). Some key influences in this array of internal variables may be the quality of teaching, the relationship between teachers and students, and the connection between the school and the local community, especially the parents. By identifying the characteristics of teaching practices, the relationship between teachers and students, and the connection between school and local community, we may be able to highlight the internal variables that improve retention. To date, no one has done significant research on the problem of the poor retention rate among indigenous population in northeast India.

India is on a fast road to economic progress. According to the United Nations, India's GDP growth for last three years has been 9.0, 9.4, & 9.0 (ESCAP, 2008). Education has provided an opportunity for many to take advantage of the booming economy and of globalization. The indigenous people have not really benefited from this economic boom mainly due to geographical remoteness and lack of quality education.

Many of the schools lack even basic infrastructure. This research will attempt to identify different components of sustainable quality education for the region.

Well-motivated teachers can help bring about transformation and engender change in this region through education. Teachers in India constitute the largest workforce after those in the defense services (Raina, 2002). The total number of teachers in secondary and senior secondary school increased from 127,000 in 1950 to 2,080,000 in 2005. Teachers are hired for teaching at various school levels such as primary, secondary and senior secondary (Raina, 2002). The linguistic diversity of India poses complex challenges, but it also provides a range of opportunities (Rajakumar et al., 2005). The reservations system has enabled the disadvantaged castes and tribes to advance significantly, in education as well as in employment (Chitnis, 2000). This study may help educators identify various elements within the educational system that cultivate high retention rates and graduation. The findings may help educators design programs, policies, training for education, and instruction for leaders to improve the rate of retention among indigenous people.

A Short History of Indian Education

India is a vast heterogeneous country in terms of culture, environment, language, and genealogical diversity. Heterogeneity has therefore resulted in diverse educational goals (Govindarajan & Gopal, 1993). As a result, Indian education has been both enriched and pulled apart by diverse philosophies, religions, political ideology, and spirituality. However, in spite of this, education has engendered and sustained continual progress since Indian independence.

During the Vedic period (2000 -1400 B.C.), the pedagogy and content of instruction was based on memory (Dutt, 1954). During the epic period (1400 -1000 B.C), a *guru* provided instruction to students who lived with him. During 1000 – 320 B.C, a great emphasis was placed on learning in order to teach others (Dutt, 1954). The code of Manu, governed the life of a Hindu for centuries. However, the Buddhist influence from 320 – 800 AD introduced new forms and images of worship along with a very different philosophy of teaching and learning (Nehru, 1960). Later, Islamic influence (800 to 1800) ushered a Persian and Arabic perspective into the Indian way of life.

In 1857, the British introduced a European system of education by establishing universities in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras (Chitnis, 2000). According to Amin (1996), British education had two basic goals: (1) the destruction of traditional or indigenous culture and consciousness, and (2) the training of an elite group of subordinate civil servants.

Today, education systems within nation states are everywhere coping with the challenges of globalization and technological innovation (Thomas, 2002). As a country, India has decided to develop its own system of education to express and promote its unique socio-cultural identity and to meet the challenges of this time (NPE, 1986). According to Dr. Manmohan Singh (2004), education alone is the foundation on which a progressive, prosperous society can be built. Through education, India is initiating a new era of development and prosperity.

In 1947, education was chosen to be the principal instrument of the country's transformation from a poor, dependent, economically and technologically backward imperial colony to an advanced nation (Chitnis, 2000). This advancement has led to the current crisis. For example, India must increase its number of universities to 1,500 by

2015, according to an advisory body that released its findings to the public in 2007 (Neelakantan, 2007). Currently, there are only 350 universities. The Government of India is also committed to promoting universal secondary education (Singh, 2007). The accomplishment of this noble talk is only possible by enhancing current teacher education and training. Information and communication technology has broken down many barriers between peoples and nations enabling them to share knowledge, interests, and concerns. Indian education is also grappling with the new reality of the virtual world and its incorporation into the world of education.

The Current System of Education

The educational system provides mainly three independent tracks of schooling and examination (Govindarajan & Gopal, 1993): The ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education), affordable for only the upper class; CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Examination), for the children of employees of the central Government who may be transferred from state to state; and SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate), for students from both the middle and lower classes of society. The schools in this study prepare their students to graduate with Secondary School Leaving Certificates. In order to acquire the certificate students have to appear for a state level examination in grade ten. Success on this examination mostly depends on students' capacity to memorize and recall lots of information, definitions, formulas and other details from the state-prescribed textbooks. Hence these kinds of schools tend to stress memorization and recall in preparation for these examinations.

All the States and Union Territories of India (education.nic, 2008) have adopted a uniform structure of school education such as the 10+2 system. However, there are variations to what constitutes Primary, Upper Primary, High, and Higher Secondary schools. For the purpose of this research, the high school denotes grades eight, nine, and ten.

Theoretical Rationale behind the Study

The study is grounded on the belief -- informed by the research literature -- that students need to be motivated to succeed in school, and thus to stick with the hard work of learning and remaining in school. School cannot control most of the external variables that motivate students to leave school. But they can control most of the internal variables that motivate students to stay in school. Research by Vygotsky (1978); Cummins (1986) and many other culturally responsive researchers (Samaras, 2002; Whiting, Grantham, & Moore, 2008; Cajete, 1999) suggest that various teaching practices, caring and respectful relationships between teachers and students, and welcoming and interactive relationships between the school, parents and the local community support student success in the learning process and serve at least indirectly as motivation for students to stay at school. Even though conditions in Northeast India differ dramatically from those places in the developed world where this research was carried on, this study will explore whether those same variables are present in the three schools being studied, and if so, whether the evidence provides reasonable arguments connecting these variables to high retention rates.

Authentic and effective teaching practice is child-centered (Noddings, 2006) and can be understood as a philosophy that interlocks in a harmonious way different principles of

learning, instructional strategy (Senese, 2005), ethics (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Starratt, 1998), and classroom management (Emmer et al 1997) in a given socio-cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978). Teaching and learning need to be engaging (Forster, 2005; Starratt, 2003), relevant, challenging, and rewarding, for both the student and teacher. Teaching is a deeply personal trade (Daniels & Bizar, 2005) incorporating different personal traits, experiences, beliefs, and role models. But a truly accomplished teacher possesses a small repertoire of powerful strategies that can help him or her organize subject matter, time, space, materials, students and himself/herself to make learning happen (Daniels & Bizar, 2005).

Authentic teaching and active learning can only be possible in an enriched and supportive environment that encourages a strong supportive relationship between teacher and individual students, both in and outside the classroom (Cummins, 1986). A teacher needs to accommodate different learning styles and provide a collaborative model for teaching which allows or nurtures the construction of knowledge, thus raising the expectations of students through assessments that lead to real world practice.

Socio-cultural and Activity Theory (Daniels, 2002; Samaras, 2002) provide a theoretical base to understand the dynamics of education and the problem of retention among the indigenous people of northeast of India. According to Vygotsky, the overall goal of education is to generate and advance development, which is the result of social learning through the internalization of culture and social relationships (Daniels, 2002). According to Vygotsky,

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level: first between

people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals (Vygotsky, 1978 p. 57).

Vygotsky stressed the importance of experience and prior knowledge as necessary to make sense of new situations or present experiences. Therefore, all new knowledge and newly introduced skills are greatly influenced by each student's culture, especially by his or her family environment (Feden & Vogel, 1993). Learning eventually leads to a higher order of thinking (Vygotsky, 1978) and awakens a variety of developmental processes that are able to operate only when learners are interacting with people in their environment and in cooperation with their peers. Of course, Vygotsky's concept of culture is more homogenous. However, in the case of indigenous peoples, because their culture is so diverse and teachers are mainly from a dominant culture, further challenges are bound to surface when dealing with the issue of retention (Ray & Jim, 2000).

Vygotskian principles are as follows:

- Social and cultural influences shape development
- Learning occurs during situated and joined activity
- Cognition is always socially mediated, especially through language
- Education leads to development (Samaras, 2002)

Vygotsky states that teachers need to diagnose and mediate student learning among students rather than use standardized tests to assess them (Samaras, 2002). This

ongoing process will involve the teacher, curriculum, student, and assessment (Starratt, 2004). The interaction between and within these factors will create a better educational environment for the student, enabling him or her to learn in his or her own unique surroundings (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989). This interaction will also make learning interesting, informative, and rewarding, particularly for indigenous people.

Research Questions

This research will be centered on the following two questions: 1) What are the teaching practices that characterize three high schools with successful records of graduating (upwards of 100%) indigenous northeast India tribal students? 2) How are successful schools affected by school leadership?

Research Design

The choice of methodology is determined by the proposed research question and the phenomena to be studied. Determining the characteristics of teaching practice requires an in-depth examination of ideas, attitudes, classroom practices, pedagogy, curriculum (Flinder & Thornton, 2004), school environment and culture (Sarason, 1996; Beachum & Dentith, 2004), relationships (Cummins, 1986; Davis, K., & Dupper, 2004; Davis, 2003), structure (Stewart, 2008; Sweetland, 2001), and beliefs. Mixed method may need to be considered as a possibility; but the researcher's challenge will be to use a particular method and philosophy that will allow the researcher to fit together (into a workable conclusion) the insights provided by qualitative and quantitative research. In short, the effective practices that promote authentic teaching and learning will be investigated.

1) What are the teaching practices that characterize three high schools with successful records of graduating (upwards of 100%) indigenous northeast India tribal students?

The second question is:

2) How are successful schools affected by school leadership?

The following sub-questions will help explore the research questions further. These sub-questions will be addressed in the interviews designed to inform the research.

1. What are some of the teaching techniques you use in the classroom to make learning relevant for students?
2. If a student requires any additional help (academic, financial, personal, physical/mental health), where does the student go?
3. How do you assist the underperforming students in your classroom?
4. Does your principal support your efforts both in and outside the classroom in creating an environment for learning and teaching?
5. Have there been instances of inter and/or intra tribal conflicts in your classroom and how did you handle these conflicts?
6. Are there disciplinary problems in your classroom? Are there school policies to handle discipline in the classroom?
7. In your opinion, what is the optimal class size to effectively teach students you are teaching?
8. Do you have access to technology? Please describe how you have integrated technology into the classroom.
9. In your opinion, what are the reasons you believe that students drop out of your school?

-
10. What is your school doing to help students remain in school up to graduation?
 11. Are you aware of school policies designed to promote respect and an appreciation for all in the school, including teachers, students, and staff?
 12. Suppose that you are promoted to be the principal. What are the changes you would work to bring about at the school? Please explain why:
 13. What is your understanding of the indigenous worldview? Have you incorporated their way of understanding into your curriculum or pedagogy?
 14. What are the challenges that you face in imparting education to indigenous people?
 15. As an indigenous person yourself, what were the challenges that you faced in your own education? What have you done to improve the way indigenous students are taught?

Research Methodology & Procedures

This research will take on a qualitative cross-case analysis study design that will apply the strategy of constant comparative data analysis (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995, 2006; Zach, 2006; Yin, 1994) to explore the teaching practices that characterize high schools with successful records of graduating indigenous Northeast India tribal students. The study will look at:

- Teaching practices
- School leadership
- Physical facilities
- School culture and character
- Class size and group interaction

Data collection will consist of focus groups of students, individual interviews of teachers, classroom and school site observations, and document analysis. The unit of analysis in this study will be twofold. First, each of the three different high schools known for their high retention rates and graduation success among indigenous students in the northeast will be considered as individual cases. Then all the three will be considered as one case. Research questions will provide the scaffolding for investigation (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002). For this reason, the interview questions will attempt to surface information relevant to both research questions (Maxwell, 1996).

Observation is important to qualitative inquiry (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In observation, the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site (Creswell, 2003; Sanjek, 1990). The advantage of observation is that the researcher can obtain a first-hand experience on the unit of analysis (Creswell, 2003). Through observation, the researcher can also observe the repeated patterns of behavior that people are unwilling to talk about in an interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This type of research can also explore certain uncomfortable aspects and stereotypes of anthropological diversity as they might appear in classroom practices, sometime subtly, and sometimes explicitly. This kind of observation will assist the researcher and the participants to move beyond the selective cultural perceptions and clichés common to the public and enable them to construct meaning from certain consistent observable patterns.

The analysis of the collected data will be an ongoing process. Analyses of transcribed interviews will be coded, using a constant-comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify emerging patterns or themes. Hyper research software will be used in identifying the emerging patterns and themes.

Limitations of the Study

Northeast India is not easily accessible for anyone from outside of this region. The researcher is not aware of any similar study or scholarly publication about the subject of the research. There is very little written literature to inform this study about the relation between pedagogy and retention, in particular among the indigenous people of northeast India. This study involves only three cases, which is a relatively small sample. Conclusions in this limited study may reflect only the conditions in those schools. The generalization of these conclusions to other sites is limited.

The bias in this research may be that the only evidence sought will be that which supports the hypothesis, and that in the process other aspects or dynamics that do not support the claim may fail to be identified and recorded. The research activities that happen within the school environment will have an effect on the teaching and learning process. During the interview, the tendency to ask only the questions that will support the hypothesis needs to be acknowledged, as well as responses that lead to tell the researcher what respondents think the researcher wants to hear or what will make the respondents look good in the eyes of the researcher.

Definition of terms

Guru-s

Guru in Sanskrit is “one to be honored.” A teacher who imparts authentic education to the students and good counsel to the community.

Indigenous people

The word “indigenous” has many meanings. In every region of the world, many different cultural groups live together and interact, but not all of these groups are

considered indigenous or native to their particular geographic area. In fact, it is only in the face of a collective or shared sense of identity that the term indigenous peoples have been internationally recognized (<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/indigenous/identify.asp>). In this research, the indigenous people are the “scheduled tribals” mentioned in the Selected Educational Statistics 2004-2005 who reside in the northeast region of India.

Ashram

Ashram is a small residential school associated with a guru.

Overview of the Study

This study hopes to provide information for and insight into the educational life of schools successfully serving the indigenous people of Northeast India. India has made tremendous progress in the field of education and development since 1947. However, the nation is currently facing a crisis in the field of education. Only 11% of the 18 to 23-year age group in India is currently enrolled in higher education (Agarwal, 2007). A great deal needs to be done to bring about parity and equity among its various populations. Higher education is only available to a select few because of the enormous competitive selection process, and due to the limited number of universities to serve a large population.

Because of this, only very few students from indigenous backgrounds have enrolled in higher education.

The indigenous people of northeast India need additional resources, skills, and education to face the challenges of globalization. This research hopes to provide a deeper understanding of the best pedagogical practices in high retention schools and how these practices are related to the challenge of retention.

In the second chapter, the researcher will review current and relevant literature regarding the education of indigenous people, history of Indian education, best pedagogical practices, educational leadership, classroom management, and teacher-student interactions. All this will be viewed from the perspective of literature that is reviewed for the purpose of this study.

In the third chapter, the researcher will describe in detail the design and methodology used in case studies, the survey instrument, the questions for interview, and the protocol for focus groups. This chapter will also include references in compliance with the criteria for research on human subjects.

Chapter four will present findings from interviews, observation, focus groups, and document analysis. The data will be analyzed and codified, using “hyper research.” Chapter five will contain the interpretations, emerging themes and the cross-case findings under the research questions with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITTERATURE

“Learning is the true imperishable riches; all other things are not riches.” Thiruvalluvar.

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will review relevant literatures that are related to the issues of dropout and retention rates. This chapter covers the following topics: reasons for dropping out, effective teaching practices, school leadership and dropout prevention, classroom management and dropout prevention, and finally the indigenous worldview.

Education in India has a very complex and unique history. It has played a vital role in shaping the life of a nation since time immemorial. Today, India is aggressively moving towards becoming a world power in the fields of technology and invention. This rapid transformation has posed major challenges to India as it attempts to maintain parity, equity, and quality in education. Indian education has been an agent of social change in the face of poverty, religious, linguistic, and ethnic violence. In the current scenario, the success of education seems to be measured more by employability than by the development of human values in building a democratic and just society (Sreelakshmi, 2008).

The educational statistics (Human Resource Ministry 2007) present a very grim picture of a high dropout rate among indigenous tribes. These statistics reflect that Indian education has had a history of excluding certain people from learning. Since around the eighth century B.C., Indian women, several of the stratified castes of Hindu society, and the aboriginal tribes (who practiced their own tribal religions) were judged unfit for learning and categorically denied access to knowledge. This exclusion was legitimized on

religious grounds that were translated into severe punishments for those who violated these sanctions. For instance, ancient texts record that molten lead was poured into the ears of a person from an excluded caste who dared even to listen to the sacred Vedas (Chitnis, 2000). In this regard, it is significant to recognize this general historical conjuncture of prejudice and exclusion in order to understand the current complexities of Indian education and, in particular, education in northeast India.

Advancements in the field of technology have opened new avenues and challenges in the field of education (Prasad, 2008), especially for the indigenous people of northeast India whose lives revolve around the land. The current curriculums of the schools in this region are mostly based on urban experience and are geared toward university education (Tirkey, 2003). The current pedagogy of education is designed to inform and impart important knowledge to an individual. However, the needed academic skills are usually taught by teachers who are not in tune with the indigenous worldview (Imchen, 2003).

For Gandhi, education not only molded the new generation, but it also reflected a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals who composed it (Kumar, 1994). In independent India, changes brought about by technological and societal advancement have forced the nation to redefine and restructure strategies for developing peoples' competencies in order to live and work meaningfully (Khan, 2004). The current Indian political scenario, based on regional and caste-based politics, has made it difficult to pursue coherent public educational policies (Guha, 2007). Adopting a teaching and learning methodology to suit the digital age, while not losing sight of tradition, is an on-going process. The educators involved in school reforms, which focus

on creating critically thinking workers for the 21st century, need to recognize the fact that while there may be workers who can solve problems, these same workers may not be the best neighbors and citizens (Eisner, 2001). Even though state leadership, architecture, and tradition often determine instructional practices in a high school, educational changes need to sustain some of the traditional values of the indigenous people, (Spence, 2005).

Dropout Rate

Multiple factors such as the quality of the school, the local community, economic status of the local families, ethnic and cultural origin, and religious affiliation either contribute to graduation or increase the risk of dropout rate (Fetler, 1989; Johnson et. al., 2001; Myers, Kim, & Mandala, 2004; Stewart, 2008). The major factors for the increased rate of drop out in the northeast are commonly attributed to poverty, lack of opportunity for higher education, no opening for skilled employment, and certain tribal beliefs. However, a child-centered approach coupled with an institutional commitment expressed through various support systems may enable a student to graduate from high school.

The common reasons attributed to dropping out from high school are poverty, juvenile delinquency, academic instability, academic failure, disagreement with teachers or administrators, and various other personal situations dealing with ineptness and irresponsibility (Chitty, 2006). However, according to some research, the most influential factor for student leaving is the lack of teacher support, the teacher's lack of confidence in individual students' performance, and the feeling that the teacher does not care (Chitty, 2006; Gross, 1990). Other researchers have considered lack of student engagement in their education (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003).

The risk of dropping out also increases when the level of student motivation is affected by a change in the family environment (Farmer et al., 2004). According to this study, the three major contributing factors for high dropout rate are: (a) poor academic performance, (b) low socioeconomic status (3) deviant behaviors (Suh & Suh, 2007). According to another study, school structure perceived as feminine can have a negative effect on the rate of dropout of males (Irvine, 1979). Differentiated instruction coupled with positive comments by teachers on report cards proved to enhance high school retention (Barrington & Byron, 1989). Successful completion of and graduation from one's high school is a major milestone for every adolescent, as it marks his or her transition to young adulthood. However, significant numbers of students, especially the indigenous children of northeast India, drop out of school before this significant milestone is achieved. India's population by 2050 will be about 1.57 billion and by 2015 will be about 1.24 billion; this means 55% will be under the age of 20 (Census 2001). This forecast will allow India to have a large number of skilled workers in different industries. Unfortunately, 42.32% of the students will drop out before the age of 10 and 65.87% by grade eight and 78.97% by the time they reach high school (Table 19, selected statistics 2004-2005).

Dropping out of high school is the culmination of a long-term process and has profound social and economic consequences for students, their families, their communities, and for the nation as a whole (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson 2007). According to one study, these things cause a country (a) to forgo an increase in the national income, (b) to forgo tax revenues for the support of government services, (c) to increase demand for social services, (d) to cause an increase in crime and antisocial

behavior, (e) to cause a reduction of political participation, (f) to cause a reduction of intergenerational mobility, and (g) to cause poorer levels of health among the population (Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002).

Dropping out means leaving school without graduating. In other words, the total number of students enrolled at the beginning of the year will have been reduced by the end of the year. They will have withdrawn for some reason or other (Lehr, 2004).

Dropping out is conditioned by various contextual factors that are often identified as: family situations, economic factors, failure in some subjects, lack of interest, emotional and behavioral disorders, underachievement, unsatisfying relationship with teachers, low self-esteem, socio-cultural disadvantage, and habitual truancy (Osher & Bailey, 2003; White-Johnson, 2001; Hansen & Toso, 2007; Zhang & Law 2005).

Research indicates that students leave school because they were unmotivated, not challenged, or were overwhelmed by troubles outside of school. The factors outside the school that promote high dropout rates are early pregnancy and an unsupportive work environment (Gewertz, 2006). Negative academic self-esteem can often lead to continued academic failure and ultimately to the decision to drop out (White-Johnson, 2001). Fine and Rosenberg (1983) indicated that high school dropouts challenge the dominant belief that education leads to success in life. According to other researchers, students' low level of engagement in their education is also an important factor leading to higher dropout rates (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). However, punitive classroom environments have been identified as a major contributor to attendance problems which ultimately lead to a student leaving the school (Mayer, & Mitchell, 1993). In a study on the dropout rate within the Native American community, the following reasons are given:

Difficulty identifying with teachers, passive teaching methods, boredom – nothing to do after school, uncaring teachers and parents, little flexibility, insufficient time to complete tasks, desire for independence, no connection to school, no personalization (large schools and classes), difficulty identifying with curriculum, tracked classes, too many classes (Iverson, 2007, p 17).

The above finding suggests that connectedness between teachers and students within the school community can enhance the rate of retention among indigenous students.

A strong cultural identity that supports a sense of self appears to improve retention rates of retention among the students (Ledlow, 1992). However, some researchers argue against the assumption of cultural discontinuity as a reason for school dropout rates. According to these researchers, there is no apparent difference in dropout rates when comparing students with a strong cultural identity with those who have been assimilated into the majority culture (Coladarci, 1983; Ledlow, 1992).

Studies also reveal that students who repeat a grade are more likely to drop out than students who are continually promoted (Stearns et. al, 2007). Studying the retention rates of students in the same grade is designed to identify students who lack academic qualifications to move on to the next grade. But in reality many other factors, including a student's social status, race and family background, ought to be taken into account when studying retention (Randolph et al. 2004).

A repeating student may view the school system as one in which he or she experienced failure. The repeating student may also be older than his or her peers and feel out of place. This age difference may encourage such a student to take on adult behavioral patterns and/ or adult responsibilities among younger students. Another reason connected with the drop out rate among the students is the rupture of social bonds between peers and teachers (Stearns et. al, 2007). This often occurs when a student is retained in the same grade more than once. Higher standards may result in high achievement for some students while for others high standards may put them at risk of repeating a grade, ultimately leading them to drop out (Felter, 1989). In general, students with behavioral issues tend to drop out of school. Research indicates that certain factors influence these behaviors: living with a nonbiological parent, living in a metropolitan area, participation in fights at school, and the experience of physical threat or harm at school (Suh & Suh 2007).

Identification of an individual student “at risk” of dropping out from early schooling may allow educators to pay greater attention to that individual. According to Zhang & Law (2005), educators can make significant contributions to dropout prevention by building a classroom atmosphere that promotes early student involvement in education and by providing direct instruction to students with various disadvantages. The National Dropout Prevention Center defines a youth at risk as “someone who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with both the skills and the self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and interpersonal relationships” (Bailey and Stegelin, 2003). According to Hansen & Toso (2007), the tendencies for dropout can be traced from the early years of schooling:

“Most of the dropouts reported difficulties as early as elementary school. They reported feelings of insecurity about friendships or acceptance by classmates, and lack of motivation to do busy work. Some shared stories that they were persecuted or mocked by other students and that teachers did not intervene on their behalf. Most resented their teachers who confused conformity with giftedness. They could pinpoint when underachievement, poor performance, and disruptive behavior began. Most noted that the patterns continued through middle school and into high school. Perceiving no advocate within the system, they eventually opted out of the school environment (2007 p.36).”

According to Suh & Suh (2007), the dropout rate can be reduced by working with at-risk students in the following four areas: their expectations to stay in school, their absenteeism, their aspiration for higher education, and their desire to develop healthy physical, social, and psychological outlooks. School experiences for dropouts tend to be negative. In many cases, they have been grouped with low achievers, with less inspiring teachers who dismiss their needs, and with those who have failed one course (Hansen & Toso, 2007).

Parental support is an essential component in getting a student to graduate from high school (Barrington & Hendricks, 2003). Devine (1996) identified parents' low educational attainment, the number of household members, and lack of motivation as reasons why students with a low socioeconomic status drop out of school. To deal with this, India has passed a bill criminalizing parents who refuse to send their children to

school or who employ them in jobs that could prevent their schooling (Suroor, 1997). This decision was prompted by the alarming dropout rate.

One can conclude that effective leadership, a positive school climate, and reasonable expectations for all students coupled with active supervision (Gross et. al. 2008) may curtail the tendency to drop out.

Underachievement & Poor Teaching Practices

Underachievement is part of most systems of education. Only a few students succeed because that is what those societies have preferred (Nixon et. al. 1996). Assumptions about education, learning process, curriculum, institutions, and its organization tend to be influenced by the economic, social, and political transformations of our time (Ghailani & Khan, 2004). Research on the dropout and the retention rates indicate that teachers play a vital role in the life of a student (Ehrenberg, 1991; Duflo, 2005). However, in developing countries, teachers often do not go through a rigorous selection process. Nor are they trained adequately to address the issue of a diverse student population. Teaching in India is not regarded as a high status job. The National Commission on Teachers reported 93.7% dissatisfaction among teachers about their profession (NCT, 1983). According to another report, many government teachers are unhappy, and often self-critical. The same study reveals that “some chose to be teachers because they have to earn their livelihood and it is a government job providing job security. Some of them said that they had no other option and therefore became teachers” (Mooiji, 2008 p 6).

Teachers with minimal commitment and inadequate training coupled with low motivation fail to engage a varied student population in school. As a result, many students drop out from school or lose interest in formal education, particularly in

developing countries. However, the dropout rate can be greatly reduced by having qualified and motivated teachers who are interested in the welfare of the entire student body. The National Council of Teacher Education was established with statutory powers in 1993 to address these issues but has made very little progress (NCTE, 2008).

Research indicates that teacher absence is very prevalent particularly in India. According to Kremer et. al (2004), “25% of teachers were absent from school, and only half were teaching, during unannounced visits to a nationally representative sample of government primary schools in India. Absence rates varied from 15% to 42%, with higher rates concentrated in the poor states.” The reasons for the absence are lack of supervision, lack of basic infrastructure, remoteness of the school, and absence of access roads. Teacher absence is also due to teachers’ involvement in non-official teaching duties such as staffing election polling stations, conducting immunization and collecting data for national census. In addition, this study also indicated that teacher absence did not diminish even with community participation, higher salary, or parent involvement.

According to Sarason,

“In the post World War II era the most significant changes in preparatory programs of teachers have been an increase in subject matter requirements, a decrease in emphasis on pedagogical theory and method, at the same time continuing to ignore the nature of the obligation of the teachers to take seriously who the learner is, where the learner is coming from, and how to make subject matter interesting, motivating, and compelling” (1999, p. 97).

Students often complain that school is boring and not challenging enough. They say it just involves memorization, and that it does not stimulate imaginative thinking. The students' ability to identify with academics influences their decision to remain or dropout from school (Griffin, 2002). Academically engaged students, and those who feel that they are part of school, tend to remain at school. Differentiated instruction appropriate to students' ability and level of academic achievement will enhance their identification with academics. Teachers are called to teach a student more than simply subject matter. Not taking individuality seriously is a surefire way of subverting the productive assimilation of subject matter, and the internalization of values and beliefs that ultimately create a collective consciousness of society (Nixon et. al 1996). In some schools, notably those schools with a predominantly ethnic minority or poor students, stereotypes are pervasive, and teachers believe that students are unlikely to achieve academically especially when teachers do not know the students well (Baer,1999). Often in India teachers do not behave as professional educators, capable of making pedagogical and other decisions individually or collectively (Mooiji, 2008). Having looked at some of the studies in the process of learning and teaching, let us examine some of the aspects of effective teaching and learning.

Traditional Teaching Practice in India

Gurukula was a system followed in Indian tradition to impart knowledge (Rajput & Walia, 2001). The students lived with the guru (teacher), actively participating in all the activities of the ashram for a particular period of time. Students were regularly provided with instruction on different aspects of life. The teacher ensured that students learned before they graduated from the ashram. The guru was the guide, leader, evaluator,

creator, and disseminator of knowledge. The Gurukula system did not offer this opportunity for the masses. Since independence, education has been offered to all and in 1986, the department of education established a comprehensive national policy on education (Govindarjan & Gopal, 1993).

The meaning and purpose of education was often defined according to the life situation of an individual. Swami Vivekananda, one of the reformers defined education, as:

“The ideal of all education should be man-making. Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all our life. We must achieve the life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has learnt by heart a whole library” (Rajput & Walia, 2001 p.240).

Gandhi’s view on teaching and learning comes out clearly in the following statement:

“A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone, I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them” (Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, *Sevak*, 15 February 1942, p *CW 75,P 269*).

Best Teaching Practice

Not the term but the reality of “best practice” has become a concern of teachers, administrators, board members, policy makers, education reporters, and everyday citizens (Daniels & Bizar, 2005). In a way, the best practice reflects the limitation of the many structures, theories, and calls for novel and creative approaches (Spence 2005; Leithwood, 2008) to education in the face of economic, social and technological changes (Khan, 2004), especially in dealing with indigenous students. In this section attempts will be made to discuss some of the “best teaching practices.”

The concept of learning provided by research and science (Bransford et al., 1999) enables us to design a curriculum that shifts from drilling and practice to a curriculum that focuses on a student’s understanding and application of knowledge. This learning style needs to incorporate the following: (a) memory and structure of knowledge, (b) analysis of problem solving and reasoning skills built on research, (c) metacognitive processes and self-regulatory capabilities, and (d) cultural experience and community participation. Learning should be experiential and provide the social activity that helps students make connections between knowledge and societal issues or problems (Starratt, 2008).

There have been many theories of learning that inform instruction over a period of time (Branford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Cohen, 1988; Gardner, 1985; Greeno, Collins & Resnick, 1996; Branford & Donovan, 2004; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Each theory approaches the process of learning and teaching from a particular point of view and in a given context of time. The main components of this best practice are: student-centered (Cummins, 1986; Liang, 2007; Daniels & Bizar, 2005), instructional

responsiveness (Villa et. al., 2005; Nixon et. al., 1996), knowledge through a higher level of the thinking process (Kohlberg, 1975; Perkins, 1995; Tileston, 2005; Kennedy, 2002), social commitment (Freire, 1971; 1981; Langer 1977; Sobel, 1999), group activity (Elmore, 1995; Vygotsky & Cale, 1978), moral or ethical development (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Starratt 2004), cultural sensitivity (Thomas 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Feden & Vogel, 1993; Rajakumar et al., 2005; Flinders, 2004) teacher leadership (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Leithwood & Slegers, 2007; Prestine & Nelson, 2005), and authentic assessment (Gulikers et. Al, 2008; Goodman & De Rameriz, 2008; Grisham-Brown & Brookshire, 2006; Van, 2005).

The following best teaching practices proposed, by Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde (2005), may help further unravel the mystery of teaching and learning particularly in the current century with all the dynamics of the modern world. These thirteen interlocking principles brought under the banner of three sub topics (a) student centered, (b) cognitive and (c) social may characterize the standard education and may provide further insight into teaching and learning.

a) Student-centered

The starting point of good schooling should be young people's real interests that are affecting them at that moment they are in class. Investigation of those current questions within the context of a school and of a community will enhance student participation. That participation can be built around his or her everyday experience that is authentic. In this scenario, the student becomes more active and engaged in his or her learning. This process will have a challenging effect on the student. In a learner-centered classroom, students learn to assess their own work and participate in the assessment of their

counterparts' work, which will ultimately lead them to be self directed and motivated learners throughout their lives (Weatherholtz, 2003). In this situation, the role of the teacher is to create an environment that is conducive to learning and teaching (Liang, 2007).

Experimental

Learning needs to be hands-on experience, based on a real and concrete experience of their day-to-day life. Students need to be encouraged to create meaning in their lives by reinterpreting their experience in the context of a larger world community.

Holistic

A holistic approach to the curriculum may help a student to engage himself or herself in a deeper study of a reality. Compartmentalization without proper dissection may not be effective. Indigenous children in particular are holistic learners and concentrate on understanding the overall concept or task before attending to details.

Authentic

Authentic learning becomes real when students are able to look at reality in totality and then connect that reality to their living environment. For this reason, the curriculum needs to be more comprehensive. According Sergiovanni & Starratt (2006),

“Authentic learning does not take place until the learner has come to an understanding of the material, by organizing information into meaningful categories and into networks of categories, by having to explain what the material looks like from different perspectives, by providing various examples, by applying the understanding to new

problems or contexts, and by evaluating the significance of new information in the light of this understanding” (pp 105).

In other words, an authentic lesson needs to have the following three components (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005):

Students need to construct knowledge – by interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and not just absorbing information.

Students draw conclusions – by elaborating their understanding or by making supportive arguments.

Students connect the topic to their own lives or to similar situations outside the schools

According to Freire (1970):

“ Authentic education is not carried on by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B” but rather “A” with “B”, mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both the parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the program content of education can be built. Authentic humanism consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation and as a project” (pp 128).

An authentic curriculum supported by the living environment of an individual can engage the student in his or her learning process, which will ultimately lead to a higher retention rate.

Challenging

Research indicates that students drop out of school due to the lack of challenges in education (Azzam, 2007). Students learn best when they are faced with genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility for their own learning. It becomes the responsibility of the educator to provide a curriculum that is authentic and engaging.

b) Cognitive

Learning becomes effective when a child is able to develop a true understanding of concepts through a higher order of thinking. The construction of knowledge developed through this process of thinking needs to find expression either through language or through other artistic forms. The quality of expression will further enable the student to develop complex concepts.

Development

The school activities need to accommodate the growing phase of children. Development means teachers need to approach classroom groups and individual students with respect for their emerging capabilities and meet at that level, while challenging them to move deeper and higher.

Constructivist

Children do not just swallow the content, but rather they prefer to recreate and reinvent a cognitive system, including language, mathematics, and literacy. The challenge of the educator is to facilitate that reinvention and new meaning by creating an environment of profound and genuine inquiry. A study done on instructional effectiveness revealed that more attention should be paid to the interaction of students and learning environments (Chang, 2006). Another study on perceptions of constructivist

teaching and learning found that the students perceived the environment as one when they could freely express their ideas and be involved in activities. Students also wanted small groups to reflect and think about issues. They preferred relevant and practical work that tested their ideas rather than a test dictated to them by the teacher (Hubber, 2005)

Expressive

A student needs to have an opportunity to express ideas and learning in different forms of media such as speech, writing, drawing, pottery, dance, drama, music, movement and other forms of visual arts. Activities need to be intentionally designed so that adolescents can manipulate opportunities and activities to fit their emerging developmental interests and needs. Through these expressions, the student can bring out his or her own identity. The same study found that in comparison with boys, girls have better ability to express themselves in a variety of forms (Ferrer-Wreder 2006).

Reflective

The deconstruction of an experience through deep reflection will enable individuals and groups to construct knowledge. Learning becomes a process when reflective thinking is introduced, allowing students to organize their knowledge and connect that knowledge to the reality around them. Reflection enables them to apply the knowledge base particularly in moments of crisis.

c) Social

Learning is always socially constructed and often interactive. Building teams that work together will deepen the idea of democratic decision-making. Effective classrooms are learning centers that are interactive, dynamic, and communicative (Benjamin 2005).

Social: Learning is always a social activity. In his paper on “Psychology and the Teacher” (1926, 1997), Vygotsky writes:

Ultimately, only life educates and the deeper that life, the real world, burrows into the school, the more dynamic, and the more robust will be the educational process. That school has locked away and walled in as if by a tall fence from life itself has been its great failing.... The teacher’s educational work, therefore must inevitably be connected with creative, social and life work (pp 345)

Learning, thinking, and knowing will take place in a social context. The school cannot be removed from the social fiber of society. The more students are able to engage themselves in a social activity, the better will they be able to learn and take on social responsibility. The national framework for children’s rights, developed in the wake of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, includes schooling, but goes beyond it, too. Freeman comments:

The right enunciated here is significant not only for what it says, but because it recognizes the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society. ... the views of children are to count [in relation to] decisions ranging from education to environment, from social security to secure accommodation, from transport to television (Freeman, 1996, p. 37).

As far as education is concerned, that right applies to all aspects of pupils’ lives in school and is especially important; but perhaps most neglected, in relation to teaching

and learning, are the core purposes of schooling (McIntyre & Rudduck, 2005).

Collaborative

Learning should lead to greater community rather than mere self-actualization. In an age of technology and outsourcing, teamwork and cooperation are essential in completing a project as it transcends geographical boundaries. The idea of teamwork can nurture students when they are still in school, giving room for individual competition.

Collaborative learning promotes learning with and from one another. This process provides students with an opportunity to listen and receive constructive criticism from one another. Group work is challenging for both the participants and for the facilitators. The activity needs to be in tune with the curriculum, needs to be relevant and engaging. Learning to collaborate with one another, even with those of opposing views, will go a long way later in the professional life. In addition, another study supports the idea of interactive teaching for understanding, contextualizing learning in appropriate ways, fostering a stronger sense of agency and ownership, and arranging social contexts amenable to collaborative learning as helpful to learning (McIntyre & Rudduck, 2005).

Democratic

The classroom is a model of a community. If individuals are able to interact, learn, support, appreciate, and understand one another, then the classroom will go a long way in nation building. Democracy is not just limited to the freedom of choice such as what books to read, what projects to taken on and so on. In a democratic classroom, children learn to challenge, collaborate, negotiate, and work together effectively, recognizing the individual difference in learning, understanding, and perception. The learner needs to assume responsibility for his or her learning.

The above thirteen principles provide educators with an insight into the process of learning and teaching. Awareness and implementation of these principles will be a great help to educators in assisting them to nurture the under achieving student population. The above study will also be of great assistance to me as I go to collect the data on the schools that have been effective in retaining indigenous students of northeast India.

According to Tileston (2005), the following ten practices can effectively help students learn better and may help with retention. These practices are: (a) creating an environment that facilitates learning, (b) differentiating between a variety of teaching strategies that address different learning styles, (c) implementing strategies that help students make connections from prior learning and experiences to new learning disciplines, (d) teaching to enhance long-term memory, (e) constructing knowledge through higher level thinking processes, (f) making collaborative learning an integral part of class room, (g) bridging the gap between all learners, (h) regardless of race, socioeconomic status, sex or creed, (i) evaluating learning through a variety of authentic assessments, (j) providing in-depth understanding that leads to real world practices, (k) encouraging a seamless integration of technology for high quality instruction.

After discussing which “Best Practice” is most effective, the researcher defines learning and teaching as a process of constructing knowledge within the context of a living historical environment that is continually influenced by external world factors. In such a cultural setting, this process of learning should enable a student to become an effective global citizen, capable of reaching out to enhance the quality of life everywhere, in all its forms. The researcher is aware that knowledge itself does not bring about positive values, but values do influence knowledge and can put knowledge to good use.

Teaching and learning have captured the imagination of scholars, poets, and theoreticians. They all proposed methods, processes, and theories to make learning effective, meaningful, and memorable. Teaching is a two-way process that involves the teacher and the taught within the contexts of a curriculum, a department, a school, and a local setting (Sylvia, 1993; Freire, 1971; Starratt, 2004; Eiserman, 2004; Bartlett, 2005). The contextualized two-way process ushers in a very complex and dynamic reality. That reality needs to be engaging, interesting, informative, challenging, and relevant even within the constraints of the multiple contexts that determine what may and must be taught and learned (Powel, 1990). Care and respect for students and their cultures will further nurture this process of learning which in turn will lead to a greater student commitment to learn what the teacher is teaching, which leads to student successful performance of learning and thus leads eventually to graduating from high school. A teacher knows something not understood by others, especially the students. In this regard, a teacher can transform understanding, performance skills, or desired attitudes or values into pedagogical representations and actions (Shulman, 1987).

Paulo Freire's theories of education and pedagogy inspired many developing nations to reassess and make changes to promote equity and parity in the field of education (Bartlett, 2005). The image of education as a form of banking was often reflected in Indian education (Freire 1971; Archer, 2007). Children were provided with knowledge and information. All they needed to do was to memorize and reproduce what they learned in the classroom at the time of examination. But for Freire, the purpose of education was to allow the students to read, interpret, and construct knowledge that would enable them to be a better human being. According to Freire (1983), reading

always involves critical perception, interpretation, and rewriting what is read. In order to achieve these above objectives, he recommends dialogical pedagogy:

“Dialogue cannot exist. . . in the absence of a profound love for the world and for [human beings]. . . . Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to other [people]. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is [a] loving [one], is dialogical. . . . Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love [human beings]— I cannot enter into dialogue.” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 77–78).

The interaction that takes place among the teacher, his or her students, and the curriculum creates an environment of enquiry, critical thinking, and application. This interaction has to be revealed within the context of a unique socio-cultural setting in relation to the larger world. In this regard, the teaching begins with the teacher’s understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught taking into account the cultural realities in the students’ communities. Teaching ends with a new comprehension attained by both the teacher and the students (Shulman, 1987)

In a student-centered or learner-centered approach, the teacher incorporates into his or her pedagogy the unique individual needs of the student coupled with different perspectives such as cognitive and humanistic psychology. The student also becomes an active participant in the assessment process. The student’s engagement is achieved by

allowing him or her to be responsible for the organization and conduct of his or her learning (Liang, 2007). The learner-centered classroom can be achieved by analyzing the needs of the individual learner and by shifting the responsibility of learning to the student community (Liang, 2007).

The job of a teacher becomes a challenge in the internet environment. Information is instantly available on any given subject. The challenge of the teacher is to identify the necessary knowledge and to facilitate it. The teacher can transform understanding, performance skills, or desired attitudes or values into pedagogical representations and action (Shulman, 1987). The following variety of best practices may be a great help in understanding the pedagogical nuances of teaching in the modern classroom

There are different ways to address these issues of teaching and learning, particularly to reduce dropping out and increase retention. According to some educators, the following six practices may help reduce dropout rate at high schools: administrative support, ongoing professional development, collaboration between teachers and parents, communication with all the stakeholders, instructional responsiveness along with the use of technology, and expanded authentic assessment. (Villa, Thousand, Nevin & Liston, 2005).

Administrative Support

Administrative support is essential in creating an environment conducive to learning and teaching. According to a teacher, “Administrators are key figures on campus and must model acceptance of all students and celebrate diversity within the school community” (Villa et.al. p 44). Holding teachers accountable and providing teachers with necessary support will foster the process of learning and teaching among students. While recruiting

teachers, administrators may need to pay attention in order to either bring in individuals who can build a positive relationship with their colleagues or to provide them with training to build such relationship (Gigante, & Firestone, 2008). Villa & Thousand (2005) recommends the following five ways to make the administrative support effective in creating a better learning and teaching environment. They are: a) build consensus for a vision of inclusive schooling, b) develop educators' skills and confidence to be inclusive educators by arranging ongoing meaningful professional development, c) create incentives (e.g., time to meet, training, listening to staff concerns, collaborative decision-making) for people at risk to change to inclusive schooling practices, d) reorganize and expand human and other teaching resources, and e) plan for and take actions to help the community see and get excited about a new vision. Cladwell (1992) upholds that a strategic leadership that supports teaching and learning is essential to creating an environment that can lead to greater retention. According to him:

The principal must be able to develop and implement a cyclical process of goal-setting, need identification, priority setting, policy making, planning, budgeting, implementing and evaluating in a manner which provides for the appropriate involvement of staff and community, including parents and students as relevant. The complexity of the process in respect to the numbers of actors indicates a capacity to manage conflict. (pp. 16-17).

Teachers often understand administrative support as support given by school leadership in fostering an environment of trust, care, and excellence. Administrators need to support teachers as professionals and collaborate with them as colleagues.

Ongoing Professional Development

Professional development enables teachers to recommit themselves as teachers. The areas identified for professional development, according to Villa, et. al. (2005), are lesson plan design, differentiated instruction, and methods for solving differences. According to some educators, a professional dialogue about teaching in a safe environment managed and led by teachers will lead to better teaching practices, which will ultimately improve the rate of retention in high school (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Professional development can be viewed as part of the supervision process. According to Starratt & Sergiovanni (2006), professional development will provide for teachers an opportunity and the resources to reflect on their practices and share those practices with others. In the model of teacher development (Sergiovanni, 2005) the teacher becomes the constructor of knowledge and builds a professional learning community through problem solving, enquiry, and research.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a practice that grows out of certain values that impact the way teachers treat their students, design their curricula, establish rules, and talk about learning (Benjamin, 2006). Successful differentiation depends on valuing both ritual and variety. Ritual is important because it establishes expectations, provides security, and instills trust that the teacher is in control. Ritual routine can also help children memorize by providing cues that trigger memory. Differentiated instruction can become a reality only with the support of the administration and additional resources. However, differentiated instruction poses a major challenge in assessing students based on their

grades. Parents who object to differentiation will need to be reassured that this will not diminish their children's performance.

Educators often struggle to infuse life into a seemingly dry curriculum, hoping that they can cultivate in their students the same love they feel for a discipline (Connor & Lagares, 2007). The challenge to ensure quality of instruction, which results in student learning and supports the professional development of all teachers, may be achieved by creating a systemic reform initiative that fosters a learning environment where differentiated student needs shape classroom-embedded professional development, and where understanding permeates both student and teacher (Butler, 2007).

Communication and Collaboration between Parents and Schools

Often schools contact students or their parents only when students are absent or have dropped out. A better communication can build trust among teachers, parents, and students. Two levels of interaction occur between schools and families: institutional and individual. Institutional interactions refer to general practices that involve all families, including parent-teacher organizations, open houses, newsletters and calendars, or inviting all families to a public event such as a play or athletic competition. On the other hand, individual interactions between parents and teachers often involve a particular child. These include parent-teacher conferences or personal correspondence between a teacher and a parent (Epstein, 1987). The communication that often happens between the school and parents is institutional. According to one study (Halsey, 2005), teachers have the responsibility to initiate parent involvement, while parents have the responsibility to respond to a teacher's request with willingness to become involved. However, parents and teachers may perceive communication efforts differently. As a result, both teachers and parents become easily discouraged by

this mismatch of communication preferences. This mismatch of communication and lack of parent involvement will affect the student's success. Parents may claim to be involved with the school, but in most cases that involvement is limited to discipline. An active participation by parents in the school can reduce the possibility of dropout from school among their children.

Instructional Responsiveness

According to Hyland (2007), "effective schools don't force students into a rigid learning mold. Instead, instruction is personalized to meet each student's need." Yet another study reveals that students want school to be more engaging through real world, experiential learning. Students want to see the connection between school and work (Azzam, 2007). The challenge of a teacher is to get the student engaged in the learning process, which will ultimately help the student to construct knowledge, providing increased opportunities for him or her to succeed.

Authentic Assessment

Assessing students' knowledge has always been a challenging task, especially in today's climate of standards-driven curricula. Governments, both national and international, demand that students be held accountable in their attempt to master high standards of academic performance (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006). Traditionally, assessment was created to measure the understanding of students after the teacher had taught, often using certain criteria which later developed as standard tests. Standardized tests are often poor predictors of how well students will apply the knowledge that they demonstrate on these tests.

The challenges of educators to assess students includes meeting content standards, assessing students' progress, focusing on diverse learning styles, and preparing students for work and life beyond schools (DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). Authentic assessment has emerged out of this discussion with the hope that assessment can be constructed to further both learning and teaching (Tanner 2001). According to National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), a wide variety of assessments, such as writing portfolios, oral presentations, and group projects, should be part of a student's school experience. These means of assessment should be able to evaluate both the student and the curriculum (Ruggieri, 2007). NCTE believes that:

- The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.
- Assessments must be fair and equitable.
- Assessments need to recognize the complex nature of reading and writing.
- The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.
- Parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process

The hallmark of authentic assessment practices is their harmony with real-world circumstances (Tanner 2001). Authentic assessment is supposed to neutralize some of the disadvantages that culture and language minority children shoulder. From one point of view, however, it probably compounds their problems. Koelsch, Estrin, and Fart (1995) note:

The level of language that students are expected to process and produce in the course of completing performance assessments is nearly

always more complex than the language of traditional standardized tests. Students who are still learning English and those who have not grown up in households where language forms and uses parallel those of the classroom are likely to be at an even greater disadvantage with performance assessments than they were with multiple-choice and short answer tests. (p. 15)

To meet these challenges, educators need to employ more authentic instructional approaches than those employed in the traditional knowledge-based curricula. However, this may result in educators becoming burdened with creating multiple assignments (Tanner 2001). The curriculum as planned, the curriculum as taught, the curriculum as learned, and a curriculum as assessed all need to be woven integrally together in order to create an authentic assessment (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2006). Authentic assessment needs to involve the totality of learning in a given environment. Authentic assessment also requires a rubric, a rubric to describe the progress of students' acquisition of scientific inquiry skills in relation to his or her behavior and a rubric that provides an example of an authentic assessment of the use of that rubric. Application of the rubric can enhance active learning, promote more sophisticated scientific inquiry, improve metacognitive development, support program evaluation, and enrich faculty development (Halonen, et.al 2003).

Authentic assessment is a process. Its role and its relationship to standardized testing are still being defined. Mehrens (1992) suggests that part of authentic assessment's

strength is the greater ease with which it can be integrated into instruction and become part of the larger educational picture. Authentic assessment nurtures good instruction. By determining how to assess students' performance in doing meaningful tasks, the probability that instruction will be modified is high. In this regard, authentic assessment may be a stimulus for implementing instructional effectiveness more systematically (Christenson, 1991).

We have looked at the above six inclusive practices that can help educators retain students, particularly in developing world. These practices can enable educators to deal with students who may be at a greater risk of dropping out of high school.

The changing global scenario (Friedman, 2005) challenges students to have skills that include critical thinking, problem solving, lifelong learning, collaborative learning, and deeper understanding (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Teaching needs to be modified to facilitate these changes. According to Zeichner (1990), there are two models of teaching: teaching as an applied science requiring certain training and skills and teaching as a reflective practice requiring the education of the whole teacher.

School Leadership

Leadership is one of the key components that determines the success or failure of a school. Leadership can play a vital role in creating an environment that is conducive to student success and reducing the over all dropout rate. Effective leadership, coupled with clear line management structures at different levels, propels the entire school towards achieving its mission. The head teacher, school culture (Hofstede, 1984; Schein 1992; Sergiovanni, 2000; Verma, 2006), and school structures are determining factors in the exercise of leadership in education. Leadership may be understood as a reciprocal process that enables

participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead to a shared purpose of schooling. Teacher leadership is an area that is gaining increased interest, from both researchers and practitioners (Muijis & Harris, 2007). In this section, I deal with school leadership embodied in the person of the principal. According to Lambert (2003), leadership, in both its definition and practice, has been an elusive idea. Examination of a different definition of leadership may enlighten or recapture our imagination.

Research suggests that principals who are friendly, open, supportive, and committed to excellence are most likely to create a school climate conducive to student achievement (Barringer, 2006 p39). According to Alan Sieber (2007), the head position for leading a school ought to be so demanding that even a highly skillful and experienced headteacher can only hope to be good at some facets of the job and want to seek to surround himself or herself with people who have complementary qualities. He or she also must not allow the exercise of leadership to be limited to the members of a small hierarchy. When we assume that leadership lies in an individual, we look for the dispositions, skills, understandings and personality features that will make this person effective (Lambert, 2003). The collective leadership is essential in making a school successful.

Howard Gardner (1995) suggests the following purposes in leadership:

A process that occurs within the minds of individuals who live in a culture—a process that entails the capacities to create stories, to understand and evaluate these stories, and to appreciate the struggle among stories. Ultimately, certain kinds of stories will typically become predominant—in particular, kinds of stories that provide an adequate and

timely sense of identity for individuals who live within a community or institution (p. 22).

Fritjof Capra (1997: 8–9) suggests that “in self-organizing systems, leadership is distributed, and responsibility becomes a capacity of the whole. Leadership, then, consists in continually facilitating the emergence of new structures, and incorporating the best of them into the organization’s design.”

This incorporation may be possible by allowing different individuals or groups to take leadership roles within the school system. “Distributed Leadership” suggests that leadership cognition and activity are situated within an interactive web of actors (leaders and followers), artifacts, and situations (Spillane et. al 2001). To be human is to learn, and to learn is to construct meaning and knowledge about the world that enables us to act purposefully (Lambert, 2003). Leadership has to embody different traits of humanness. Only then will authentic teaching and learning become an ethical reality (Starratt, 2004).

Authentic leaders learn to explore “engendered attunements” in themselves and others in order to move toward creating new and safer spaces for learning together. They do this by establishing an ethic of remaining present to the emotions shaping and reflecting energy in lived experiences of schools (Beatty, 2007). Such leadership will eventually be able to develop strategies that will ensure the graduation of students who are admitted to the school (Davies & Davies, 2004).

Classroom Management

Classroom management is an essential skill that can make the journey of learning and teaching more successful for both students and teachers. Creation of an environment of care, trust, and excellence enables the teacher to maintain student

engagement in the classroom and in the courses that are being taught (Spitalli, 2004; Lalumbo & Sanacore, 2007). The student engagement becomes effective when the teacher is able to strike a balance between student autonomy and teacher control (Sparks, 2003).

Is classroom management really everything? New teachers often ask this question. According to Palumbo & Sanacore (2007), classroom management is an open door that good teaching must walk through to establish itself in the classroom. Without it, the education of students that society depends on for its own continuity will not have a chance to settle in. Research reveals that teachers' success on their jobs largely depends on managing their classroom well (Akin & Kocak, 2007). The five aspects of classroom management, identified by Şentürk (2006), involve: (a) creating a physical environment conducive to effective teaching and learning, (b) providing effective management of instructional time, (c) planning and facilitating classroom learning, (d) aligning interpersonal relations with instructional goals and objectives, and (e) managing student behaviors.

A cohesive and thoughtfully constructed personal philosophy of classroom management can effectively deal with student issues and create a love for learning and teaching. There are different models of classroom management that may be adopted depending on the subjects taught, class size, geographical location ...and so on (Buckley & Cooper, 1978; Malmgren et. all, 2005; Şentürk, 2006). Teachers also need to be aware of the fact that all students are unique and that they do not fit into the one-size-perspective (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2007). Any model adopted needs to ensure student engagement and student-centered activities in a positive learning environment. Underperforming students

may require assistance and encouragement in learning. This encouragement needs to be provided in an atmosphere of care rather than power (Sparks, 2003).

Effective classroom management creates an order that will enhance learning. Cohen, Intilli, and Robbino (1979) describe order as "the situation where there is a clear set of expectations for all classroom members, where people can anticipate expectations, and where there is a high degree of conformity to the expectations." In the context of Northeast India, classroom order will be essential to cultivating learning since the number of students in the classroom may be beyond 50.

Learning becomes effective when students are able to take responsibility for their own learning. In taking the responsibility, students may be able to self regulate their behavior and solve the problem themselves. The checklist provided by Goldberg (2002), which is in appendix 4.13, will be a great guideline for teachers to ensure that an environment of learning is created and maintained in the context of a classroom.

Indigenous Spirituality & Worldview

Indigenous people have a deep and profound spirituality that is rooted in nature. That rootedness enables them to connect with the rest of the cosmos. Tribal people are sensitive to this relationship and seek explicit permission from a tree before it is to be cut down. They do the same with animals and with inanimate objects. Tribal understanding of spirituality is very different from that of the dominant societies around them. For tribals, spirituality is linked to the life force that flows through all creation. Tribals' very mode of life itself manifests a deep and profound spirituality regarding this force, devoid of wordy theological jargon (Kullu, 1996). The tribal community also upholds the dignity

of every living being. Among them, there is a sense of equality among men, women, and children. For example, in a dispute resolution process, every one has a voice and decisions are arrived at only after listening to different stakeholders.

Each indigenous group may have a unique spirituality, yet one thing is believed in common -- the interconnectedness among all the animate and inanimate objects around them (Wilf, 1992). Tribal spirituality is strongly connected to habitat while societal values are adopted to bring harmony to all the living. The concept of power is understood in terms of service to the community. According to Wilf (1992), tribal spirituality is the summation and signifier of both concrete and non-material existence. Any significant rupture in this spiritual-concrete relation leads an individual to an alienation that is evident in him or her, often in the form of a maladaptive lifestyle. The respect for creation, gratitude towards the creator, non-transferability and nonpossessiveness of the earth are based on the belief that everything has its origin in and from god (Kullu 1996).

Each indigenous group has its own worldview, depending on its habitat, history, and resources. An indigenous worldview underlies every aspect of life: language, social system, religious beliefs, and even the way they go about their daily life. Such a worldview may be defined as a set of concepts that relate individuals in any culture to the natural universe and to other humans who comprise their social reality (Christie, 1985). In many groups, there is no concept of private ownership. The land is usually referred to as "mother," and any desire to buy or sell it is anathema. They use common assets only in so far as they enable them to meet their needs and in living the day to day reality of existence (Kullu, 1996). Many indigenous groups measure time as a function of the sacred circle of life (Cajete, 1994).

A significant implication for education is the acknowledgment that learning is culturally based and thus every method of teaching and learning must take cognizance of the learner's worldview (Hewitt, 2000). Modern education has defined itself as a rational process that is detached from the natural and invisible world (Cajecte, 1999). In the indigenous worldview, learning is embedded in nature. According to Kawagley (1995):

Most indigenous peoples' worldviews seek harmony and integration with all life including the spiritual, natural, and human domains. These three realms permeate traditional worldviews and all aspects of indigenous peoples' lives. Their constructed technology was mediated by nature. Their traditional education processes were carefully constructed around mythology, history, the observation of natural processes and animals' and plants' styles of survival and obtaining food, and use of natural materials to make their tools and implements, all of which was made understandable through thoughtful stories and illustrative examples. This view of the world and approach to education has been brought into jeopardy with the onslaught of western social systems and institutionalized forms of cultural transmission....the western worldview with its aggressive educational practices and technoscience orientation has placed indigenous cultures in "harms way." These cultures have been characterized as primitive and backward and therefore wanting, are subject to an endless stream of assimilative processes to bring their practitioners into mainstream society. The indigenous people are forced to live in a constructed and psychic world

not of their making or choosing. Little is left in their lives to remind them of their indigenous culture; nor is there recognition of their indigenous consciousness and its application of intelligence, ingenuity, creativity and inventiveness in the making of their world (pp. 2-3).

In Australia, the indigenous people are referred to as aboriginal. A study found that aboriginal children learn best by personal trial and error, observation and imitation, and context-specific tasks (Batten et. al, 1998). The study further lists four main characteristics of learning, prevalent among the indigenous people: a) the group is more important than an individual; therefore, children are more comfortable with approaches that are cooperative rather than competitive; b) indigenous children are holistic learners and concentrate on understanding the overall concept or task before attending to details; c) indigenous children have a strong visual and spatial sense in their method of receiving and processing information; d) indigenous children have a reduced reliance on the role of language that predisposes them to perceive and think in ways that are unconstrained by the linear nature of verbal thinking. Western education systems are often controlled and influenced by the industrial-technocratic-political complex. In this process, we forget that indigenous knowledge is rooted in a local culture. Instead of imposing on them what we think is the best we need to take into account their culture. Harris (1990) writes:

The hidden curriculum undermines Aboriginal values in a variety of ways. . . . The values held by non-Aboriginal teachers, and the values implied by school organization, such as being on time and keeping strictly to a program, can be unconsciously imparted. . . . Teachers . . .

may accuse students of cheating when they are actually cooperating with each other in ways praised in Aboriginal society. . . . When European Australian teachers voice their concerns about the many days per year Aboriginal children spend at funerals and away from class, they are implying that funeral ceremonies are not as important as school. . . . When European Australians hold the most senior positions in the schools, a negative message is sent out to Aboriginal children about status or respectability of Aboriginal authority. (p. 8)

It may be time to look anew at the role and function of schooling to incorporate certain traits of the indigenous worldview into education and, in particular, into the schools of the indigenous communities. The challenge will be to prepare them to compete with the larger world. To accomplish that, education must start where students are, within their worldview and in local culture. Incorporating the tribal worldview in this way will contribute to our overall understanding of the educational processes at work among indigenous peoples, especially regarding the high dropout rate among them.

Indigenous knowledge is rooted in a local culture and is the source of community cohesion. This framework explains the origins and the happenings of the world (Orr, 1992). Knowledge is not really separated from the reality of day-to-day life. Therefore, there is a need to create an authentic curriculum coupled with a pedagogy that incorporates indigenous worldviews for pupils of Northeast India. An authentic curriculum refers to a curriculum that springs forth from the genuine, unmediated individual and from the developmental fascination of children and their teachers (Sobel,

1999). In an authentic curriculum, the focus is the child and his or her interests in the context of a larger world. It has to begin with an appreciation for wonder, awe, and fascination that are often part of childhood, but unfortunately are kept out of the classroom. The teachers need to be prepared to appreciate these moments and turn them into educationally substantive experiences. Such experiences will provide an opportunity for students to encounter something real and meaningful rather than merely the mastery of an abstraction (Kane, 1999).

Conclusion

Schooling is fascinating, challenging, and every one has an opinion about how teaching and learning should be exercised. The following words of Tolstoy capture that fascination about school:

There is something undefined in a school, the school spirit. This spirit communicates itself rapidly from one student to another, and even to the teacher, expressing itself in the sounds of the voice, in the eyes, in movements.... It is palpable, essential, precious, and therefore bound to be the goal of every teacher.... This spirit is the essential condition for partaking of mental nourishment (Tolstoy, 1954, p 199).

The educational system in northeast India has a major challenge in attempting to create a fusion of today's global worldview with the indigenous people's worldview. A visitor to this region can easily observe the tension between the two. The sustainable development of this region can become a reality by having an educational system that embraces indigenous values and trains its teachers to respect the local way of life

(Lyngdoh, 2003). The advancement of knowledge coupled with the modern concept of management can enhance the retention of students and ensure the identity of the indigenous people at the same time.

Education is the key to nurture the development of northeast India. According to Kunnukal:

“Education must, as it were, simultaneously provide maps of a complex world in constant turmoil and also the compass that will enable people to navigate their way through it. Acquisition of mere quantitative data is no more appropriate in our world today. To succeed education must be organized around four fundamental types of learning, which throughout one’s life will be the pillars that support a well educated person. These are: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live with others, and learning to be.” (2003, p. 212)

The indigenous people and their cultures are in transition. Their dependence on the land and forest is changing. They are moving towards a western ideology and life style. This transition will create an emergence of new ideas, habits, and customs in society (Darlong 2003). A value-based enquiry into their life and culture will strengthen their ingenuity and capacity to venture into the unknown. Education is an investment in the development of human resources. All future development essentially revolves around the nature and quality of human resources.

This chapter has reviewed the scholarly literature around the themes of student drop out, effective teaching practices leading to student retention, school leadership and its effect on student retention, and classroom management and its effect on retention. In

chapter five the researcher will refer back to many of the studies cited here to see whether these highly successful three schools reflect the kind of factors reported here and therefore suggest a greater likelihood of students staying in school.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The choice of research design is determined by the phenomenon being studied and by studying related research questions (Yin, 2003). Determining the characteristics of teaching practice, teachers' relationships with students, leadership of the principal, the school and classroom culture, and curriculum as they might affect the retention of the indigenous people of Northeast India will require an in-depth study. A qualitative cross-case analysis design allows one to study the research question from various perspectives. As such, research design, theory, and method come together in order to create guidelines that will be effective for this particular study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This chapter will present the overall research design, the research question, the sample, the research methodology, the data collection and the data analysis process.

Research Design

In a case study, researchers do an in-depth analysis of a socially bounded system that reflects and situates the problematic or supportive relationships that exist within a site of investigation (McMillan & Wergin, 2002). Yin (1994) outlining steps one should take for observing a case, such as developing the research questions, identifying propositions for the study, and specifying the unit of analysis. Stake (1995) saw a case study as a qualitative research design that follows a more exploratory research method of data collection in which one gathers information, such as: what is the nature of the case, what its historical background is, and what other contexts could affect the case. Stake argued that it is almost impossible to be acquainted with a case before designing a study. For this

reason, the researcher will make a flexible list of questions, progressively redefine issues, and seize opportunities to learn the unexpected (Stake, 1995, p. 28-29).

Merriam defines a case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, preface p. 8). Such a definition allows the researcher to study a particular phenomenon within a complex reality. A case study, as defined by Merriam, allows the researcher to observe a process (in which people in the case are involved) and give guiding questions to indicate what exactly the researcher will be observing while collecting data. According to Merriam (1998) a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved. Researchers or policy-makers conduct case studies to acquire in-depth information about the issues and, in particular, about unusual successes or failures (Patton 1990).

Case studies can contribute to educational epistemology, both theoretically and pragmatically (Stake, 1983). Through interviews of teachers, the researcher wishes to hear them describe their teaching strategies, how they feel about their students, what they expect from their students, their successes and frustrations in teaching, how they relate curriculum units to student experiences, how they assess student learning, how they manage classroom behaviors, and how they feel about the principal and the parents (Yin, 2003). Focus group interviews will surface how students relate to their teachers, what subjects they like and dislike, their opinions about dropping out or staying in school, how they value their education, what they like or dislike about the school, continuities and discontinuities between their indigenous culture and their school experience, how they feel toward the principal, etc, (Creswell, 2003). From observations of how the school and

classrooms functions, the researcher expects to get a sense of the general culture of the school: is it friendly or authoritarian, connected or disconnected to the indigenous culture and to parents, how the principal exercises leadership, classroom behavior management, pedagogical strategies, teacher-student relationships, quality of learning expected of students, learning assessment and feedback strategies (Stake, 1995). By analyzing school documents such as the mission statement, discipline policies, parent communication documents, teacher and student handbooks, the researcher hopes to get a clear picture of the public presentation of school-wide expectations and to compare these expectations with the data from interviews and focus groups (Stake, 2006)

Case studies are designed to build inductively rather than to test concepts, hypotheses, and theories (Merriam, 1988). By analyzing data from these sources and comparing common themes, the researcher hopes to draw conclusions related to the research question by triangulating evidence from interviews, observations and documents that provide consistent and verifiable grounds for those conclusions. Collectively these themes will constitute the results of the individual case studies for each school.

Subsequently the cross-case analysis will attempt to surface common themes across the three cases which might then be used as evidence for arguing that these common internal characteristics among them appear to influence the high retention of students.

Recognizing that each school serves different school populations in different areas, the cross-case analysis expects to find some unique school characteristics which take into account those differing student populations as well.

Research Question

A school revolves around two basic functional tasks: teaching and learning, along with organizing agents for teaching and learning (Prestine, 2005). In this perspective, educators are challenged more than ever to recognize, respect, and respond to wide-ranging individual differences among learners (Chickering, 2006) and teachers. Young people often fail to fulfill their potential and develop their powers because of questionable practices and uncertain assumptions that are constitutive of their educational system (Nixon, et al., 1999). The educational statistics of India released in December 2007 reported a 21% retention rate among the indigenous people of the northeast in comparison to the national average of 38%. This research will be centered on the following questions:

1) What are the teaching practices that characterize three high schools with successful records of graduating (upwards of 100%) indigenous Northeast India tribal students? 2) How are successful schools affected by school leadership?

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the bridge that brings together theory and method, perspective and tools, to guide the research. Methods are tools that researchers use in order to gather data. Qualitative researchers use one or more methods to collect data, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, document analysis, and observation. Gathering data is a discovery process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). That process involves the active participation of the participant and the attention of the interviewer. Research questions provide the scaffolding for investigation (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002). Therefore the interview questions need to be based on larger research questions in order to surface

what truly needs to be known. For this reason, interview questions need to be specific (Maxwell, 1996). The purpose of the interview is to find out what is in someone else's mind and what is on that person's mind (Patton, 1990). The interviewer needs to listen attentively while keeping up with the pace of conversation and the interviewee's interest in it. The researcher needs to carefully observe the surroundings, gestures, and body movements of the person being interviewed. Nuanced verbal cues are central to a person's perception of the research question. Interviews help the researcher understand different kinds of perspectives, experiences, and kinds of learning. The researcher needs to use open-ended questions and sub-questions to collect authentic data while assuring the quality of information (Patton, 1990). The researcher also needs to consciously refrain from imposing meanings on situations and instead learn to construct meanings through negotiation with the research participants (Lather, 1986). The interviewer needs to maintain a level of confidentiality (Douvanis & Brown, 1995) as agreed among parties, prior to the interview.

In these case studies, the unit of analysis will be those practices, within and across three different high schools, which may have been influential in retaining and graduating indigenous students of the northeast. Success for these schools is defined by the percentage of students who graduated from the Secondary School and left in 2007 with a Certificate (SSLC).

The Population and Sample

Sample cases are purposefully selected based on criteria. "The criteria you establish for the purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Case sites are selected

after examining the relevance of each particular school, its diversity across contexts, and the opportunities there to learn about complexities and contexts. A case study needs to cover both the phenomenon of interest and its context, yielding a larger number of potentially relevant variables (Yin, 2003). Three schools were selected for the purpose of this case study. Schools were selected based on the results of the Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination 2007 (SSLC-X Class). Likewise, schools were selected according to their retention and graduation rates, location, and their ethnic composition. Two schools were selected from the state of Meghalaya and one from Nagaland. All the three schools are owned and managed by the members of a registered society under Society's Registration Act 1860, and funded by their respective state governments.

School Number One

Shillong, the location of the first case site, is known to be the educational hub of Northeast India. Students flock from all over the northeast to get a quality education at Shillong, both at the K -12 level and in higher education. School number one is a secondary school in Shillong, known among the natives for its quality education. After consulting several indigenous people of the region, the researcher chose this school in order to provide maximum variability. There are about 950 students and about 50 staff consisting of teachers and other employees. There are thirteen teachers who have the required degree (B.Ed) to teach at high school. The student body consists of students from various tribes, castes, and social classes. 69% of the students come from tribal communities, 4% from schedule caste communities, 6% comes from other backward communities, and 21% from the general categories. The school was established in 1967. The school has succeeded in maintaining 100% passing result in the examination

conducted by the Meghalaya Board of School Education. Meghalaya Board of School Education reported the following rate of graduation among high schools in the state: in 2006, 43.5%; in 2007, 42.00%; and in 2008, 57.35%. However, all students graduated in the selected school. The school is located in the heart of the city and has an easy road access.

School Number Two

School number two is located in a village, about 25 miles from the capital city. This school has also been successful in graduating 100% of its students for the last three consecutive years. The school has about 950 students all of whom come from indigenous communities. There are 26 staff consisting of teachers and other employees at this school and 75% of these teachers are indigenous. There are nine teachers who hold a degree in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed). All the indigenous teachers received their education from the same region. The average graduation rate in the state for the last three years has been only 47.50% in comparison to 100% in school number two.

School Number Three

School number three is located in a medium sized town 40 miles away from the state capital along the interstate highway in the state of Nagaland. It is about 17 hours drive from Shillong on a normal day. There are about 600 students at this school, with 98% of the students belonging to indigenous tribal communities. There are about 20 staff members consisting of teachers and other employees at this school. There are five teachers who have training in education (B.Ed). The teachers and student body are comprised of different tribes and castes. Nagaland Board of School Education reports 61.88% graduation rate for the last three years in comparison to 91.33% at this particular

school. This site was chosen to provide us with an insight into the educational environment of this middle sized town and its students.

Instruments and Data Collection

In conducting this case study, evidence was gathered through a variety of techniques to study the teaching practices and the leadership in these three high schools. The study utilized the methodologies inherent in a qualitative study, using individual interviews and focus group interviews to gather information and the perception of teachers and students. Observations enabled the researcher to gather data in the realities of some classrooms. Documents provided the researcher with policies and practices concerning the day to day running of the school.

Student Group Interviews

Group interviews, according to Brown et. al (1989), are not merely a convenient way of gathering information. They also give rise to synergistic insights and solutions to the issues that are in question. Each student group consisted of six to eight students from grades nine and ten. Students were selected to represent different ethnicities and tribal backgrounds. The researcher had to get the approval of the students who were selected from the class list. The respective class teachers made recommendations in regard to the selection of students. The researcher had the freedom to choose any individual student for the interview.

Once the students were identified and agreed to participate, the parents of the students were informed of their child's selection to participate in the study. The principal first signed the consent form permitting the students to participate in the interview. Then the principal suggested that the parents' permission was not required as per the rules of

the school since the interviews were held during the school hours, and on the school campus. (Appendix: G, J, K). After attaining a signature from each of the students, the group interviews were held. The interview protocols for students were used to begin the interview. The interviews were audio taped. The groups interviews lasted anywhere from sixty to ninety minutes, depending on the group. The researcher took notes during the interviews. The group interviews were based on prepared questions (Appendix B), but were not limited to those questions. Adaptations had to be made depending on the group. At the end of the group interview, the group was debriefed. Then the audio tapes were transcribed for analysis and study.

Teacher Interviews

In all, fifteen teachers participated in the interview. Five teachers each from the three schools were selected. The teachers selected for the interview were teachers who were teaching Mathematics, English, Science, and Social Science at these three high schools. The reason for selecting math and science teachers is that indigenous children find science and mathematics more challenging than the other subjects. Research finds that some students drop out of school because they are not able to cope with science and mathematics (White-Johnson, 2001). The researcher chose an English teacher since English is not a native language and the indigenous children generally have a reduced reliance on the role of language (Batten et. al, 1998). Finally, a social science teacher was chosen because students would be learning social issues, quite different from their own familiar living environment. If there were two teachers teaching the same subject, then the senior teacher at the high school was selected for the interview. The principals confirmed the researcher's selection of teachers.

Once teachers were identified, they were invited to participate in an interview lasting anywhere from sixty to ninety minutes. Interviews were held at school within the school hours. All the interviews began with an informal introduction and review of the researcher and the research project. In every interview the researcher explained the protocol in detail (Appendix A). The teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions about the process or the interview itself. Once the interviewee signed the consent form (Appendix L), the interviews were audio-taped and the researcher took notes. The researcher used the interview protocol to begin the interviews (Appendix A). Later on, the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were given to teachers to check for authenticity.

Observation

Observation is usually part of a qualitative inquiry (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In observation, the researcher takes field notes (Sanjek, 1990) on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site (Creswell, 2003). The research focus was on three different high schools. The researcher was an observer and not a participant observer (Creswell, 2003. Muncey & McQuillan). The advantage of observation is that the researcher can obtain a first-hand experience by watching (Creswell, 2003). Through observation, the researcher observed patterns of behavior that people were sometimes unwilling to talk about in an interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher took field notes during the observation period (Sanjek, 1990). The observation protocol was developed by the researcher by taking into consideration various effective teaching practices. The researcher also referred to his notes taken during a graduate course on curriculum leadership in developing the observation protocol (Appendix E).

After attaining explicit permission from the principal and the teacher, the researcher observed five classrooms for a full class hour in school number one. Due to the constraint of time the researcher trained another principal of a school to observe three classrooms in school numbers two and three. The observer was trained by the researcher to use the same observation protocol. Later, the findings were collated and a chart was created.

Documents

Documents such as copies of the school diary, mission statement, and the attendance register were collected for an analysis of potential evidence of those school practices identified with high retention rates. The school diary contains rules regarding discipline, the mission statement, the routine of the school, the school's expectation of a student, and pages to communicate with the parents. The school diary serves as a link to connect with parents.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis is vital for bringing forth, in a congruent manner, the results of a study. According to several options, the approach to data analysis can be ethnographic, narrative, or phenomenological. Data analysis strategies, which were applied in this multi-case study, were based on the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). One of the categorizing strategies in qualitative research is coding (Maxwell, 1996). Unlike quantitative study, coding is used to separate data and rearrange findings into categories that facilitate a comparison within and between these categories, all of which ultimately leads to the development of meaningful conclusions. As points emerged that related to one or more of the conceptual propositions accompanying the sub-questions, they were

coded, using the hyper research software. As similar ideas emerged from other sources, they all were put together to look for similarities and contrasts. The following are some of the sample codes: (BTT- Best teacher traits: “I like her best ... she is very impartial coded” BTT, RFS –reason for liking the subject).

Triangulation of findings helped to verify the researcher’s interpretation by indicating coherence across three or more data sources. That is, the collecting of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods, gave the researcher a more accurate portrayal of the findings (Maxwell 1996). In each case study, the researcher looked for coherent patterns within documents, interviews, focus groups, and observations.

Analysis is a matter of giving useful meaning to recorded first impressions as well as to final compilations of coded data (Stake, 1996). In cross-case analysis, the researcher’s challenge was to bring to light the patterns found in the study and an understanding of the uniqueness of the patterns within and across the cases (Merriam, 1998).

Ethical Issues

The researcher needed to be aware of the ethical issues involved in research. The confidentiality of the researcher’s sources of data, the process of collecting the data, the ability to identify one’s own biases, and finally, following a practice acceptable to the community of practitioners were all-important, ethically and professionally. The ethics of consequence, responsibility, social justice and care (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) needed to be taken into account while doing the research. The researcher participated in a program

that conferred a CITI training certificate. Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to conducting the research.

Concerns with Bias

Case study method is an appropriate method for these kinds of studies. However, it also permits considerable subjectivity on the part of the researcher, especially regarding the way in which data is collected and analyzed. Throughout the process, the researcher examined the data and drew conclusions that emanated from the data rather than from the researcher's own preconceptions. Furthermore, the teachers and students may have told the researcher what they thought the researcher wanted to hear and not necessarily what was happening in reality. The researcher's personal experience in the region working with indigenous people may have also influenced the interpretation of data, moving the researcher to look for confirming data while ignoring disconfirming data. However, the researcher was aware of these biases. Care and attention were taken to diminish biases through the triangulation process and by the researcher's method of checking findings of earlier drafts with the subjects.

Chapter Summary

The third chapter specifically identified the research design and methodology of the study, the process of data collection, method of data analysis, and the concern over bias.. The researcher had the CITI training and was certified to conduct such a research. The letters were sent to these schools in advance (appendix) and permissions were granted by the respective principals.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings of a number of data sources that the researcher drew on. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and documents pertaining to each of these three schools provided the researcher with many sources of information. The education board publications and the school handbook also provided basic information about the schools and their everyday functioning. The researcher attended staff meetings, parent teacher meetings, and observed the interaction between parents and the school authorities prior to the beginning of classes. The researcher also observed the art of teaching and learning taking place within the context of a classroom. Each situation presented a unique opportunity to better understand the school and its possible impact on the student graduation rate.

This research was centered on the following two questions: 1) What are the teaching practices that characterize three high schools with successful records of graduating (upwards of 100%) indigenous northeast India tribal students? The second question is: 2) How are these successful schools affected by school leadership?

This chapter is organized into three different case studies. Each case study condenses the findings from student group interviews, teacher interviews, and observations of the classroom and observations concerning the principal.

School Number One

School Number One school was established in 1967 under the Society's Registration Act of 1960. It permitted the school to receive resources from the state and central

government for the purpose of imparting education to the people of the region. This school continues to teach and graduate students from all castes, tribes, and ethnic or religious groups. Emphasis is given to religious, moral, psychological, social, intellectual, and physical formation. A high standard of morality, discipline, and character is promoted through various activities, competitions, and work (School Diary, 2008). All efforts are made to build future leaders for the nation and the world. The prayer before the commencement of every school day is as follows: “Dear Lord I thank you for all the good things you have given me. Help me to be always good and faithful. Bless my mummy and daddy and all the dear ones. Bless my motherland with peace and prosperity. Protect and defend us from evil” (School Diary, 2008 p 6).

The researcher was on campus at 8.30am. The researcher noticed the friendly and cordial relationship that existed at the school between teachers and students, parents and school authorities, and among all the teachers. The researcher had an opportunity to be at the staffroom many times during the same week. There were many students in the staff room who came to meet with individual teachers. The teachers appeared to be very committed to the profession and had an appreciation for the principal. All teachers appeared to want their students to succeed and bring a good name to the school.

The researcher observed the interaction of the parents and their children with the school authorities. The researcher observed the arrival of students by remaining at the entrance of the school for five days, each day at the same time. A good number of the parents bring their children to the school, using their own mode of transport. The researcher observed a cordial relationship among parents, teachers, and administrators as the latter greeted the parents and the students. Because many of the parents were bringing

their children to school in their own vehicles there was a traffic jam near the school. There were also security officers checking the identity of each child at the entrance of the school before allowing children to enter the school campus. Likewise, parents were not allowed to go with their children beyond the second gate of the school.

The school hours were from 8:45am to 3:00pm. The researcher witnessed a similar traffic jam at the end of the school day. Visits to the classrooms were informative and encouraging. The researcher was able to meet with many teachers at the school and have a conversation with them about teaching and learning. They were very enthusiastic about sharing with the researcher their success stories and struggles. The construction of a new library and chemistry labs were underway. A section of the campus was closed for this purpose.

However, the researcher was not able to meet with the principal until about 10:30am on the first day. There were so many parents and prospective students waiting to meet with the principal that she could not get away earlier. The visit with the principal was very engaging. The researcher, with the assistance of the principal, identified six students for the group interview drawn from the class lists of grades nine and ten. The principal suggested a few names and the researcher choose six students representing different ethnic identities for the group interview. The researcher also met with the teachers, handed over to them the interview protocols, and scheduled appointments for an interview with each of them.

Student Group Interview

The group interview, with six students from grade nine and ten began with a question about the subject they liked most and the reason for liking a particular subject in

comparison to other subjects. The subjects mentioned were English, Mathematics, Moral Science, and Science. One student in particular liked Biology because she wanted to be a medical doctor to serve the sick members of her community. She also wanted to understand how the biological environment worked, with life organisms supporting one another. Another student selected English literature because of the sentiments that the poets and writers expressed in their work. The love for English was enhanced due to the way the teacher taught the subject. Often students stated that, "She teaches with love." Several students also found English to be relevant to life, particularly in securing a job in the future. One student said, "English is the lingua franca. Without English, we cannot go anywhere." Yet another student liked mathematics for its set of numbers and the challenge it posed in real life. "Besides," she said, "I just find it easy to cope with." Another chose Moral Science because it helped her and friends build their character and it taught them the important values of life. She said that subject enabled students to differentiate between good and bad things and helped them to become better people in society.

These responses seemed to show that all of the students in the group had a favorite subject (hence a potential anchor for staying at school) as well as evidence that they all liked other subjects as well. In other words, the group reflected both an interest in the content of various academic subjects as well as an appreciation of how the subjects were taught and could be applied to their own lives. There seemed to be a positive experience of learning apparent in their responses. The students also seemed to reflect their desire to continue their studies in view of better future economic benefits.

Teacher Characteristics

Students were then asked to describe the characteristics of a teacher they liked most at school. Each student described their understanding of and experience with a teacher. The students described their favorite teachers, highlighting different attributes and qualities. These descriptions have been grouped into the following categories: a) caring and creative teachers, b) clarity of instruction, c) mastery over the subject.

Caring and Creative Teachers.

Teachers who cared about their teaching and their students were admired and valued for their professional integrity and commitment. Students described these teachers as impartial, nonjudgmental, honest, loving, patient, encouraging, flexible, humorous and caring. According to the students, these teachers respected their students and held them accountable for their actions without prejudice. According to one student, “My teacher is a loving teacher and she treats us with much patience and love. She makes us understand things very easily. She is impartial and makes the class very informative and interesting.” Adding to this, a second student said, “My teacher has a very soothing voice.”

A third student reported, “I like my English teacher. I like her best ... she is very impartial. She is good.” A fourth student stated, “My tribute goes to my English teacher because she can communicate with us very well; she understands our problems and she does not lose her temper. Even if she scolds us, she does not make us feel bad. She scolds us in a good way. She helps us, doesn’t discourage us. She has the right talent for teaching.” A fifth student said, “I like a particular teacher because she is impartial; she is very honest and sincere. She makes me understand things and helps me remember them. She is the most competent of all the teachers at the school. She’s the best.” The sixth

student reported, “My teacher makes us feel at home. She always tells us to do things in a right way. She is very impartial; she treats everyone as her own child and she is the best.”

One of the students shared with the group her own story about a teacher who helped her to get properly focused in life and to become a better student. She said that she felt that the teacher really appreciated her from his heart: “He appointed me captain of the class and that made all the difference in my life and today I score the highest grade in my class. I always remember him, even though he does not teach here any more.” The teacher’s appreciation for her enabled her to be enthusiastic. As a result, she wanted to express her gratitude to the teacher by being a good student.

In describing the characteristics of a good teacher, a student said, “the teacher should have patience and the capacity to understand each student, with the desire to improve their skills.” One of the six students said that a teacher needed to understand students and should be able to interact with them patiently. This interaction needed to be built upon trust, enabling students to approach the teacher with questions. Students need to feel that the teacher cared for them and had affection for them. According to three students, the teacher needed to be impartial, honest, understanding and should be God fearing: “Sure! Teachers should not unnecessarily scold us,” stated another student, “Scold us only when we need prodding.”

These responses suggest that caring and creative teachers can make enormous differences in the lives of their students. Through tangible and intangible ways, their teachers intentionally expressed that they believed in their students. Positive remarks during and after class nurtured the students’ desire to learn. These responses suggest that teachers’ caring and support may have, contributed to a better rate of retention.

Clarity of instruction

According to one student, “my Science teacher is literally so practical. She explains the most difficult things in such a simple way that I find it easy to understand, grasp and remember.” Another student reported, “I like the way my mathematics teacher teaches. I just love the way he explains. I found math difficult earlier but now because of the teacher it is easy for me.” A third student added, “my teacher is so practical when he explains things. He connects the subject matter to what is happening in our lives.”

A fourth student in the group stated the same: that a teacher needed to link subjects to every day reality and should be able to explain things by using real life examples. Teaching needed to have more practical applications of the material to make it relevant. A fifth student expected the teacher to have a passion for teaching and a deep love for her subject.

According to all the students, reasons for liking a teacher were reduced to the following: a) the teacher communicates well, b) the teacher has a talent for teaching, c) the teacher helps students to understand difficult words and concepts in a simple way, d) the teacher makes the subject interesting through stories and illustrations, e) the teacher understands the need/level/capacity of student, f) the teacher is interactive and can deal with students, and g) the teacher has capacity to clarify doubts in a nice way.

Mastery over the subjects

According to three students, “[They] like their teacher because she knows her subject well she also has a good general knowledge.” According to a fourth student, “The teacher describes the subject so well that it maintains interest even though the subject is boring at times.” All six students seems to agree that their teachers knew well the

subjects that they were teaching and were able to use examples that connected the subject matter to real life situations of their students.

Students seemed to aim higher when teachers valued them and believed in them. Students appreciated it when teachers came prepared to teach the class and were sure of what they wanted to teach that day. A teacher who engaged students appeared like an expert in the subject and helped students to appreciate the subject. A good teacher also provided opportunities to have discussions and allowed extra time for students to complete their homework. Finally, a good teacher became engaging when able to narrate stories.

Caring and creative teachers, clarity of instruction, and the teachers' mastery over the subject create dispositions in students to remain engaged in their school work. The above teacher characteristics had made learning effective for these students. It seemed to suggest that students would stay and perform well at school if the teacher was caring, creative and able to provide a clear instruction based on the mastery of the subject he or she is teaching.

What Students Do Not Like in a Teacher

Most of the students in the group were unanimous in portraying the traits that they did not like to see in a teacher: 1). They do not want to see a teacher who is not willing to appreciate students and who always finds reasons to criticize the students, particularly in regard to homework. 2). The students prefer not to deal with a teacher who has no passion for teaching. 3) Students don't want teachers who have no skills for interacting with the underachieving student population.

The students' perception of their teachers was limited to a small sample, and may have been somewhat biased. Nevertheless, this sample touched upon some or many examples of what research claims are "best practices." This kind of evidence tends to support the hypothesis that good teaching will contribute to high retention rates at school.

Students' Perception of Causes of the Dropout Rate

The students were asked to determine what they thought contributed to the dropout rate among their peers from other schools. The reasons provided by the students were not directly connected to school number one, since this particular school had a one hundred percent graduation and retention rate. However, the answers did throw light on why these students remained at school. The students in this school were not necessarily affected by poverty since their parents could afford to send them to this school. This external factor probably contributed to the high retention rate.

The following are some of their reasons for the dropout rate as reported by the students themselves. One student noted, "Some of the students can't handle pressure and they feel extremely stressed out. As a result, they can't concentrate any more and they leave school." Some cited family problems and lack of money. Others pointed to failure in a course that leads to students' retention in the same grade. One suggested that field work to supplement the income of their parents for the upkeep of the family would lead to dropping out. Once a student starts to work in the field, then his or her focus changes from study, eventually leading the students to drop out of school. Two other reasons cited were parental indifference to education and the number of children in a family. For example, in Khasi families there are many children, including cousins, who grow up

together. This puts pressure on the parents. Often they count on the elder siblings to drop out of school to raise more money to maintain the family.

Students' Perception of School Leadership

The students responded to the question, "What changes will you make if you are appointed principal of this school?" The students had the following answers to share with the researcher and the group. One of the six students stated, "I'll try to understand my students and maybe not put so much pressure on them." Two other students seemed to agree, "If I am the principal, I will first find out the reasons why a student is not able to perform in the school. And instead of getting angry with a student, I will make the student aware of his or her responsibility and work with her/him to get a better grade." A third student suggested, "As a principal, I will increase the length of summer vacation." A fourth student seemed to want to add to that, "I will make the school a better place, and will try to reduce the pressure on students and provide them with time for more fun activities." A fifth said, "I will introduce more languages such as Sanskrit and Hindi at the school." The last one said, "I will reduce the weight of school bags."

The students' perception of leadership seemed to suggest that students were looking for a school environment of learning that was enjoyable and relaxed. They wanted an environment that reduced pressure on students. Given the competition for university seats, one might wonder whether "pressure" is necessary or at least acceptable.

Teacher Interviews

The researcher chose five teachers for an interview at this school. The researcher interviewed two English teachers, one mathematics teacher, one science teacher, and one

social science teacher. The researcher chose these five teachers because they represented the core of the curriculum and would provide broad based evidence of common teaching practices. The researcher had interviews with each teacher for over an hour (cf. interview protocol, Appendix 2). The researcher conducted these interviews at the school during the school hours with the permission of the principal. All teachers were well versed in more than one language. Some of the languages spoken were Hindi, Bengali, Assamite and Khasi. The teachers were contacted in advance. Once they agreed to participate in the interview, they were provided with the consent forms. The researcher went through the consent form in detail with each individual teacher and offered him or her ample opportunities to ask questions and seek clarifications. The teachers were requested to sign the consent forms in order to participate in the in-depth interview. After the teachers signed the form, the conversations were tape recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed documents were returned to the teacher to ensure accuracy. In order to protect the identity of the teachers, codes were used when analyzing and reporting the findings.

The interview data was summarized by identifying teaching practices that tended to point to common practices among the five teachers rather than presenting all of the interview responses, teacher by teacher. The interview data was summarized by the following interview themes rather than by teacher-by-teacher summaries. The themes are: characteristics of teaching practice, teachers' perception of leadership, teachers' perception of causes of dropout, teachers' practices around classroom management, and teachers' observation about the school culture.

Characteristics of Teaching Practices

During the interview, teachers were asked about various aspects of teaching and learning at their school (Cf: Appendix 2). In particular they were asked about various teaching techniques they used in the classroom to make learning relevant, informative, interesting, and applicable. They were also asked about the way they handled the underperforming students in their respective classrooms. The social science teacher reported that debates in the classroom created very lively discussions among students particularly when the topic was relevant to them. The teacher reported that it was fascinating to see how introverted and shy students actively participated in these discussions. The teacher reported that these discussions generated research projects among the students and helped them to develop skills in public speaking. Discipline in the classroom had also improved as a result of these debates.

Another technique that was used by the same teacher allowed students to bring into the classroom newspaper clippings related to the subject being taught. According to the teacher, students were given the opportunity to share their findings, either by talking to the class or by creating a chart. Three teachers reported that field trips to different sites in and around the state had also helped students to learn about issues facing people every day. Excursions to Delhi or to Calcutta likewise opened the eyes of the students. When they returned from these excursions, students became more active and wanted to know more about what was happening around the world. Many students looked forward to these trips. However, even though trips were a learning experience for the students, only a few could afford them, said one English teacher.

To help students understand civics lessons, the teacher sometimes took the students to nearby orphanages or to houses of the destitute. Students talked to the inmates, cleaned the place, and often brought food to them. Once they returned from these places, students were asked to write a reflection about their experiences and what they could do to improve the living situation of these unfortunate people. In civics class, discussions were often centered on the plight of physically challenged children and exploited women. In order to raise their awareness about the socio-political reality of the country, students visited the state legislature and observed its function. Students were also given group assignments to study and present papers on issues regarding the dowry, child labor, and alcoholism. The same English teacher offered Complete Works of Shakespeare to the best performing student of the class. This incentive created a spirit of competition among the students.

A positive and cordial relationship with parents helped students focus on their study. One particular teacher tried to meet with each of the parents at least three times a year. Parents were apprised of the study habits, behavior, and grade of their child. In most cases, the parents cooperated with the teacher to help the students perform well in his or her studies. The handwriting of many students was very sloppy and illegible. English teachers often had to purchase cursive writing texts at their own expense to distribute to students. These texts helped many students to improve and develop legible hand writing.

Teaching aids such as maps, a globe, and different types of charts were easily available and inexpensive. For example, social science and science teachers had been using these simple teaching aids to help students understand the subjects for the past many years. The teacher also recognized the need to have new and technologically

advanced teaching aids to help students compete with students of other schools.

However, she admitted that the school could not afford such expenditure. According to her, the extensive and repeated use of charts drove home the lessons taught, with the children remembering the lessons for a long time.

Conducting regular quizzes either on an individual level or group level also helped to improve memorization among students. This was reported both by the science and mathematics teachers. Once students were able to understand the subject, then a liking for the subject was developed, ultimately leading to greater participation in the class. According to the mathematics teacher interviewed, “my challenge as a mathematics teacher is always to create an interest and liking for math among students.” The teacher added that quizzes were also a fun way of teaching mathematics. Students gained confidence by solving problems in a short period of time. Learning was also fun when it was done in an environment of competition and adventure.

Completing the syllabus within the academic year was necessary at school, even though many unplanned holidays occurred due to political violence or to the death of a national political leader. If the syllabus was not fully covered, it could affect the grade of children in the state level examination. As a result, there was a certain amount of pressure to complete the syllabus while continuing to make learning an enjoyable experience for both students and teachers. According to the mathematics teacher there: “The project works, however small it may be, builds excitement, and engages students to be creative. They create triangles, squares and other items and measure distance and height. This type of engagement reduces the pressure students feel at school.”

The underperforming students needed extra time, particularly just before examinations, to go over the lessons that they did not follow well in class. It was a necessity for these students. Most of the teachers helped these slower students after the school hours or during the lunch break. Some of these students could not afford to buy textbooks but the school often provided them free of cost at the recommendation of the teacher.

Many of the students approached teachers with their emotional problems. According to one teacher: “Most of the students do come to share their struggles which they cannot share with their own peers.” The researcher asked the teacher about her motivation to continue as a teacher, even though the salary and other benefits were minimal. She answered:

“I joined here as a teacher not for the sake of money, but to prepare the children for the future. It is a great honor to train the future generation. I will continue to work here with a very minimum salary. I have a great sense of satisfaction and joy. It is great when graduated students come back to meet with me. They express gratitude and tell me what they have done for themselves and others. It is a moment of great joy. That is what keeps me motivated and for as long as I can I will continue to teach and share my knowledge with the future generation.”

According to the English teachers: “The entire teaching is based on text books and copies. There are no visual aides available at the school.” The teacher also had to explain the text and its meaning in a way that could be understood by students, often by using local images. Teaching Shakespeare’s works was often very challenging. The

students had very little understanding of western culture and its societal customs. The text had to be explained over and over again. Some of the slow learners met with the teacher after class hours to get a better grasp of the lessons taught. In cases where students failed to understand the beginnings of any text, it would affect their learning and grade later. A visit with the teacher after school hours enabled the student to have a better grasp of the subject and prepared him or her for the next class on the following day.

According to a science teacher: “Most of the students do not come from a highly intellectual background, even though these children are a second generation to go to school.” Parents, however, wanted to ensure quality education for their children and were willing to make sacrifices. Parents allocated a major portion of their income for the education of their children, making major sacrifices in their personal lives. The school admitted children from any economic, social or ethnic background. Many of the children had very little command over English when they came to school. The foundations of these children were very rudimentary, even though many were intellectually very bright. According to a fifth teacher, “bright students do not necessarily come from educated or rich families alone, but from very poor and uneducated families.”

All these teachers seemed to believe strongly that children could succeed if they had the will power and the support of their teacher. The challenge was “to help the student understand the lessons and to keep the spirit of learning and adventure alive,” reported the fourth teacher. Students needed to grasp the subject well in class, since very little academic help was available at home. It was the duty of the teacher to ensure that the children understand what was taught in the class room. To help students understand the topic, the teacher might need to explain it over and over again. Time was a major

constraint, but for an experienced teacher, it became easy to know if the whole class was following the topic. If not, the teacher had to change the way he or she explained the subject matter. Often the teacher had to use different local images and language to drive the message home. The teacher also had to call students by name to ascertain if they understood what was being taught in the class. If few of the students got the answer right, then the teacher had to explain the lesson of the day in a different way. The researcher asked how she remembered all the names of her students to which she replied, “It is a habit and I learn all the names within the first month of the class.”

According to all five teachers, the principal reminded them on a regular basis about their responsibilities, roles, functions, and the care that teachers needed to exhibit in order to achieve a one hundred percent retention rate and graduation. She also shared with teachers the challenges and stories of success in this area among the first generation of students going to high school. These conferences were very inspiring and helped maintain motivation and dedication among teachers. Helping students, particularly the underperforming ones, drains lots of energy from the teacher. The teachers also had to prepare students for major events at school such as parents’ day, children’s day, annual day, principals’ day and so on. Students were normally divided into groups and were given different tasks such as performing a dance, skit or a drama for the event. These activities helped students to work as a team and develop skills of leadership and communication. Although these activities placed constraints on teaching, it brought more joy and happiness among all sections of the school. Many of these groups later developed into study groups and became a great aid to the underperforming students.

According to the science teacher: “I need to believe in myself and my teaching; only then can one manage such a large classroom with such a diverse population.” Preparation of the lecture of the day needed to be done with great care and attention. The explanation needed to be catchy to maintain interest among students. The attention span of the students was very limited. It was all the more so when the subject was difficult and the language spoken was English. “While teaching English I tried to bring local literature to capture their attention,” said one English teacher. But the challenge was to find a local literature in English that was imaginative and meaningful. Most of the indigenous literature was still available only in local languages.

Students were provided with a list of new titles in English literature on a regular basis. Some children’s parents would in fact purchase some of these new books on their visit to Calcutta or Delhi. Students brought these books to class and were often ready to share these books with others in the class. The school did not often have the resources to purchase many of these books. However, at least the students were aware of the new titles in literature and had a chance to read a few because of the generosity of some of the parents.

Students were given assignments, both individually and in groups, to write short essays on different topics: my country, my state and my tribe. The best essays were selected and read in the class by the students. These kinds of activities helped students build confidence and self-respect. They also provided them with an opportunity to share with other students the different traits of their particular tribe, clan, or community.

According to all the teachers, the lecture method was the best method for instructing students in a large classroom since no technology was available to teachers.

The challenge was to make instruction simple, inspiring, and informative. A certain level of discipline needs to be maintained in class while allowing playfulness and fun. Creating the right balance enabled students to maintain their attention while capturing the essence of the lesson that was being taught.

Yet another challenge, according to a mathematics teacher, was learning how to deal with the growing up issues of adolescence. Some of the students got into eating “kwai and kini” (tobacco products with arrack nut and beetle leaf) which affected their attention span in the classroom. Such behavior also affected their ability to finish their homework on time. The teachers needed to recognize these student behaviors and needed to address them immediately. If the teacher was not able to handle a problem, then the student was sent to the principal who would in turn notify the parents of the student. In most cases, the teacher would work with the individual student to overcome the current crisis. This was often done by motivating the student to focus on his or her future. Parents, in a good number of cases, collaborated with teachers in dealing with these issues. Often these issues did not remain confidential. The student also might get pressure from his or her peers to give up such behavior as the distraction would affect the grade of the whole class.

One English teacher stated that “it is the duty of the teacher to understand students and work with them. This involves meeting with students personally, either before or after class.” Such personal interventions have helped students to participate and prepare better for class. Meeting with individual students built a personal relationship with them which led to better classroom behavior and learning. The extra classes held at school on Saturday and sometimes on Sundays enabled underperforming students to catch up on

their work. According to a social science teacher: “Teachers do not receive any financial benefits by conducting these extra classes at school. They do it just because they love their students.”

Yet another challenge according to the second English teacher was the act of balancing personal life with school life. The life at school was sometimes very draining. But the teachers often placed their priority on children who had been entrusted to their care as if they were their own. That was one of the contributing factors that likely led to one hundred percent graduation rates at this school. The homework done by the children also needed to be carried home to be checked since the time at school was not enough to go through each of the assignments personally. These home work copies, numbering anywhere from one hundred and fifty to two hundred, needed to be evaluated in two or three days, and then returned to students. This happened week after week. The homework needed to be looked at thoroughly to help each student in the areas in which he/she needed to improve to graduate.

According to the social science teacher, about 20% of the class was very bright and needed to be challenged to do more, even while catering to the needs of the rest of the students in the class. If the class was not challenging, it led to issues of discipline. The bright students who came to class were often ahead of the syllabus and liked to dominate the classroom. The difficulty was to create a balance in teaching that allowed bright students to learn more and the underperforming students to get enough knowledge to graduate. The school also needed to secure ranking on the state level. Bright students needed to be encouraged in the classroom so that they would be able to secure those ranks for the school.

Visiting the schools in the south of India helped one teacher to develop an effective teaching practice. According to her, a healthy competition introduced in the classroom enabled students to spend more time understanding the subject taught and to come up with creative ways of expressing their learning.

Summary

The teachers used the following teaching methods to engage their students in the process of learning.

- Debates, which engaged even the introvert students
- Field trips, excursions and news paper cuttings connected the learning with the local and international issues.
- Visits and social service projects that developed among students a sense of social accountability while learning.
- Parent-teacher meetings that strengthened the parental involvement in their child's learning.
- Use of locally available teaching materials that helped learning
- Regular quizzes and games that helped learning to be fun and engaging.
- Projects that built excitement and made learning creative
- Teacher availability during and outside the school hours that helped the slow learners create a relationship with the teachers
- Use of local language and literature that got students more engaged in learning
- Positive classroom environment, coupled with caring teachers, that increased the sense of belonging among students

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- Individual attention, particularly for the underperforming students, that drew them to learning
 - Extra curricular activities that nurtured the creative aspect of student learning
 - Introduction of new literature that aroused the curiosity to learn
 - Group and individual assignments that provided an opportunity to share students' heritage among the peers and thus connect learning to their environment
 - Motivation and direction provided by the teachers that enabled students to pass through the issues of adolescence while reducing distraction.
 - A personal relation with students and their families that created an environment for learning
 - Teachers' commitment to student achievement, coupled with passion for teaching, that brought better academic results
 - Ongoing professional development and visits to other schools that helped teachers learn different pedagogy and best practices

The interviews with teachers seemed to provide evidence that their teaching practices and indeed the generally supportive environment of the school worked consistently and strenuously to help students succeed in their studies. This positive environment both in the classroom and around the school would appear to support the hypothesis that such an environment coupled with caring relationships and good teaching practices sustained high student retention rates.

Teachers' Perception of the School Leadership

The support of leadership for the faculty and staff at school was admirable according to these teachers. The leadership there closely monitored what teachers did to create an atmosphere of learning. According to one English teacher: “the principal sits down with teachers and talks with them on a regular basis about their students, teaching and extra curricular activities.” These conversations were very cordial and inspiring. The leadership wanted to ensure one hundred percent graduation. Once the teacher gave the names of the struggling students to the principal, the latter provided the necessary resources and support to enable the students to graduate from high school. According to the second English teacher: “the principal is a very dynamic person and has decentralized her powers. She has empowered teachers to organize and administer the classrooms according to the creativity of each teacher.” The principal held discussions with teachers from each grade on a regular basis to assess and to plan. These discussions were very informative and helped teachers improve their skills and deepen their passion for teaching.

According to the social science teacher, the principal promoted national integration even though there were no celebrations held on Independence or on Republic Day. Instead, the students were encouraged to actively participate in the special activities held at school during those weeks. The formal celebrations were often not held on the designated holidays due to strikes held by political parties. Organizing a celebration for any of these occasions could jeopardize the safety of students, teachers, and the infrastructure. Teachers were required to create projects or programs for students to deepen their love for the nation and their respect for all forms of life. Most of the teachers

would take this opportunity to involve all students, particularly the silent ones in the class. These popular celebrations often helped students to connect with the teacher and other students. This connectedness got all the students more involved in their studies.

The science teacher suggested that she would improve school hygiene if she were given the opportunity to be the principal. According to her, the number of toilets was not sufficient for the number of students. She also suggested that she would focus on the development of the current library, putting a reading room where students would have access to many journals and magazines. A fourth teacher reported that the principal provided them with good leadership, support and direction. This teacher understood that the principal had many constraints and needed to function within the parameters provided both by the management and the state education board. “The principal offers all the support and guidance when it is about a student who is struggling,” said the English teacher. The math teacher said to the researcher, “we are proud of the fact that we are able to retain and graduate one hundred percent of our students. This would not be possible without the guidance and leadership of our principal.”

According to the science teacher, he would have introduced more modern technology at school if he had had an opportunity to be in leadership. The introduction of modern technology would place students at a better advantage when it came to admission to higher education. The current leadership had made efforts to introduce computers in the school. However, financial constraints prevented the authorities from introducing more computers at the school. The teacher continued to inform the researcher that the principal had a vision and was willing to work with teachers continuously to improve the quality of education. The principal hoped to offer new courses in science, commerce and

in business, if the board approved her suggestions. The principal also was trying to get additional facilities for the school to help the quality of instruction.

The school is landlocked and, due to an adjacent construction, had very little sunlight and fresh air for the classroom. According to a Math teacher, it was important for youngsters to have fresh air in the classroom and if she were in leadership, she would create an environment that enhanced teaching and learning at school.

All teachers noted that the current leadership was very supportive, not only in matters related to academics but also in personal matters. It was easy to talk with the principal about personal problems and she would always lend a hand of support. “This kind of support and understanding has helped me to be more committed to the school and to the children,” reported the social science teacher.

According to teachers the principal provided direction, supervision, and support to teachers and students in creating an environment of learning and teaching. The principal seemed to believe that every student could graduate from school. This belief was further passed on to teachers who in turn did whatever they could to pass this belief on to students. The belief and practice of principal appeared to be a major contributing factor in reducing dropouts at schools. The evidence suggested that the leadership played a vital role in creating an environment that was conducive to teaching and learning at school.

Teachers' Perception of Causes of Dropout Rate

Dropout was a very rare phenomenon in this particular school. Students transferred to other schools, either due to changes in a parent's job or income. The school authorities knew about these transfers in advance. The researcher was told: “There is no system to track these students about their performance at other schools. As a teacher, I firmly

believe that these students graduate with colors.” The girls in this culture got preferential treatment which, in a way, helped to improve the high retention rate among all the high school students. The teacher added, “I want to see my State shining Meghalaya, bright Meghalaya, smiling Meghalaya, educated Meghalaya, and healthy Meghalaya.”

The teachers’ comments pointed to a number of external reasons why students might dropout of school. Some of the external factors affecting dropout reported both by students and teachers were lack of family support, poverty, social pressure, parental indifference, and field work. The evidence suggested that the school environment and supportive external factors contributed to low dropout rate at this school.

Teachers’ Perception around Classroom Management

Class room management was often a challenge, particularly with 86 children in a literature classroom. Yet another teacher had 58 children in the class. Why so many children at school and in one classroom? The researcher was told that “the quality of teaching and learning is so well known in the state that every parent wants their children at this school.” Sometimes it was hard for the principal to reject children. The principal also admitted a few children from the marginalized of the society. According to one English teacher, “I am trying my level best, to give a little bit, a little more time for those marginalized students irrespective of caste, creed, religion, everything.”

State level examinations determined the syllabus of the high school. There was tremendous pressure on teachers to complete the syllabus in a given time. There was also very little leeway for teachers. Towards the end of the semester teachers would have to hurry up with the classes to finish the syllabus. When they did this, however, pressure built up in the classroom. Students not able to cope with this pressure might engage in

deviant behavior. A teacher noted, “I have to stop my teaching and discuss with the students the examinations and the pressure they will have from parents, teachers, and peers to perform well in the final examinations.” Certain confidence- building exercises helped students to cope with this pressure. According to a math teacher, “It is the system that needs to be blamed for all this chaos. We need to change our syllabus and make learning more engaging than memory exercise.” Undue pressure was created when all the teachers hurried up with the lesson plans, leaving some of the students seeking help with certain tutors outside of the school. Most of the parents were ready to spend lots of extra money for their children’s education.

The classroom was very diverse. Students and teachers were from different ethnicities, tribes and states, often speaking multiple languages. There were conflicts between tribal and non-tribals, and between groups of the same tribe in the classroom. The school had a policy to deal with these issues right from the beginning. National integration was nurtured through various activities and programs at school, right from the start. In spite of these efforts, there were conflicts. Since there were too many students within a classroom, it was extremely difficult to address social issues in detail. These conflicts became acute when there was a competition for a prize or recognition.

According to social science teacher, “Students are made aware, right from the beginning of their semester that they are in a mini-India. All are Indians and they must come to school to learn as Indians and not as tribals or non- tribals.” Dealing with students from different backgrounds was a challenge. The administrators had helped to create a physical environment to promote national integration. The researcher noticed in passing all the photos of all the different national leaders, particularly those involved in

the freedom struggle, and how they were placed in a prominent place at the school. The texts under these photos were taken from quotations promoting freedom, equality and justice.

School Culture

Northeast India is facing many challenges such as insurgency, poverty, minimal infrastructure, illiteracy, natural calamities and many more. Many families arrived at Shillong, the educational capital of northeast India, with an intention of earning a quality education and a decent job. There was tremendous pressure to provide admission to children at school in spite of the limited facilities. The school leadership and the teachers tried to provide an environment of learning and growth in collaboration with parents.

The media had introduced western culture and behavior patterns which were not always in conformity with the values and traditions of the indigenous people. As a result, there was a tremendous change in attitudes among young people towards elders and indigenous cultures. For example, “Three years ago cricket was not known here and hardly anybody played that game around here. Now you go to any remote part of the state you can notice that kids and young adults are playing cricket. It is so popular,” reported a social science teacher. Children also were bringing that culture to school. Some of the children liked to imitate these heroes of cricket or some hero or heroine of a recent film. Some children also followed the western pattern of dressing and behavior without really thinking about it.

Likewise, pop songs and pop music were attractive to students at school. Many liked to wear T-shirts with the names of places or people of western cities, especially

America. The new shopping malls in the city enticed students to hang out in these places, causing them to be absent from school.

The science teacher reported that she was not initially accepted well by her colleagues, students and parents due to her place of origin and religion. “They considered me as an outsider for over two years, but now I am part of their community. They are tolerant of my religious practices and my ethnicity. They have learned that I am interested in educating their children. They also found that my religious practices can enhance their faith experience.” The principal played a vital role in creating a culture of inclusiveness at the school. The second English teacher reported, “I accept their culture; I try to mix with them as they are. I don’t try to change them and in turn they accept my culture.”

The school had a culture of professionalism. The researcher observed that the programs appeared to be well organized and individuals took time to prepare these functions. Two of the teachers reported that evaluation had helped them to organize the programs better at school by taking into consideration the suggestions provided by other teachers, students and parents. The teachers reported, and the researcher experienced, a sense of commitment and passion that existed at the school. According to one English teacher, “In spite of the inclusive culture, one can still feel uncomfortable at certain times, particularly when there is political unrest.” By and large, however, there was mutual respect found among all sections of the school, regardless of ethnicity, language, and caste. “It is always a challenging task to get into their (indigenous) confidence,” reports the math teacher. The diversity factor at school helped bring together the rich heritage of various Indian cultures. There were Khasis, Janitas, Garos, Paners, Nagas,

Manipuris, Mizoes, Tamils, Tripuris, Bengalis, Malayalees, Dalongs and many more. All brought with them a tradition and a world view. According to a social science teacher, “the school environment is enriched by these cultures by learning about them, by experiencing them through interaction, by cultivating an exchange of ideas, and by introducing new dance forms.” One English teacher reported that,

“[She] tries to appear to them just like a second mother, always accessible, irrespective of their caste, creed, and religion. For me, everybody is my student. Each and every child is important to me. So if they are important to me, I think the relationship will be reciprocal. If I love them, love begets love. So they love me in return.”

“Love for the institution is inculcated and nurtured throughout their presence at school,” reported the science teacher. According to the same teacher, students learned about the tradition of the school and passed it along so that it went from one generation of students to another. Developing a deep feeling for the institution was important. For many of the students it was a home away from home. Most of the students also came to visit the school and meet with their teachers after they graduated. They were proud of their heritage.

There was evidence of the school’s attempts to create a healthy fusion of traditional culture with modern popular culture. The school seemed to uphold and appreciate the traditional cultures by creating opportunities to perform the traditional dances and other art forms. The interview evidence seemed to indicate that a sense of belonging nurtured by the school among its students have contributed to high success rates among their students.

Classroom Observation Data

The following chart, based on classroom observations, provides a summary of the researcher's perceptions of the five teachers in action. The observation was done in the classes of two English teachers, one mathematics teacher, one science teacher and one social science teacher. The observations were done during the class period of these teachers. The researcher used the observation checklist for effective classrooms. The rubrics assisted the researcher in identifying some of the classroom dynamics.

The findings reported in table 4.1 indicate that a pre-prepared format of instruction was helpful in creating a learning environment within the classroom. An effective classroom can academically engage students and help organize instruction to cater to the needs of the student body. An effective teacher uses different strategies to conduct class on a given day. An organized classroom seemed to be an important factor in retaining students at school. The summary chart indicates that one of the English teachers used 76% of the format, while the second English teacher used the format only by 46%. The mathematics teacher used 62% of the format and science and social science teachers used 54% of the format, respectively. It is doubtful that any teacher follows all the techniques contained on this chart on a given day. It would be misleading, therefore to conclude that one English teacher was "better" on that day than the other, although that might be the case. The more important conclusion from the data in table 4.1 is that all five teachers were using a variety of some of those strategies during the classes observed. That larger picture presents evidence that students were experiencing a variety of efforts that stimulated their learning, rather than a uniform pedagogy, class after class.

Table 4.1 Teacher Practices

		T - 1	T - 2	T - 3	T - 4	T - 5
		(E)	(S)	(SS)	(E)	(M)
01.	Did the teacher MAP OUT the lesson on the board?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
02.	Measures taken to ensure successful TRANSITION.	No	No	No	Yes	No
03.	Did the teacher REVIEW the major concepts from the previous lesson and ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
04.	Did the teacher explain the PURPOSE of today's lesson clearly and accurately?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
05.	Did the teacher ask PROCESSING QUESTIONS throughout today's lesson to CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
06.	Did the teacher take five minutes at the end of class to SUMMARIZE today's learning?	No	yes	Yes	Yes	No
07.	Did the teacher ask the students to REFLECT on what they learned?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
08.	Did the teacher assign work in a VERBAL or WRITTEN form?	Verbal	Both	Verbal	Verbal	Both
09.	Did the teacher model all the strategies, behaviors, etc?	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	Yes
10.	Did the teacher consciously support the students by focusing on their POSITIVE qualities and PRAISING their efforts?	Yes	Yes	yes	Not sure	Not sure
11.	Did the teacher handle PROBLEMS quickly and discreetly, treating students with RESPECT and FAIRNESS?	No	yes	Not sure	Yes	Not sure
12.	Did the teacher create a safe, supportive ENVIRONMENT in which students could grow and learn?	Not sure	Not sure	Yes	Not sure	Yes
13.	Did the teacher emphasize the "SPECIALNESS" of each individual student and the group as a whole?	Not sure	yes	No	Yes	Yes

(E= English teacher one, S = Science teacher, SS = Social science teacher, E= second English teacher, M = Mathematics teacher)

Classroom Behaviors

Three of the teachers were positive and appreciated the students in their effort to learn the given subject matter. The other two teachers were not explicit in positive comments. Two teachers handled discipline in the class with respect while one of the teachers forcefully reinforced her authority by raising her voice and ordering them to be quiet. The researcher did not observe any discipline issues on that day in the classroom of the two other teachers. Two teachers dwelt on the uniqueness of individual students and reminded them of their privilege in being at a good school. One of the teachers used statements like “your parents are proud of you” and “you need to keep them that way by being good students.”

Students appeared to be very cooperative and seemed hungry for more learning. The teaching method seemed to be centered on memorization in order to pass the state level examination, even though teachers were making efforts to connect the subject matter with the living environment of the students.

Classroom Process

Three of the five teachers (English I & II, social science) clearly mapped out their lesson plan of the day on the blackboard, while the other two teachers just mentioned in words what they would be doing on that day. The science, mathematics, and one English teacher specifically asked questions from the previous day’s classes while the other two teachers made summary statements about previous day’s class. Except for the social studies teacher, the other four teachers clearly explained what they hoped to achieve on that day. English and social science teachers asked students questions to check if they

were following what was being taught on that day. The English teacher, in particular, was asking students for the meaning of certain English words from the lesson of the day.

Three teachers summarized the main points of the day in very clear terms while the mathematics teacher rather abruptly ended the instruction at the school bell. All teachers wanted their students to do some homework in preparation for the class next day. The mathematics and science teacher gave the students homework instruction both in writing and verbal form.

Classroom Environment

Given the large numbers in each class, the classroom environment was caring. The students were engaged and were quite attentive to what teachers were teaching. I did not notice any major discipline issues. A few students were now and then communicating with other students in the class, but the teacher handled the distraction quite well. The classroom was really crowded and students and teachers had very little space to move about. The observation was limited to one class hour.

Summary of Findings for School Number One

The main themes that emerged from the data from school number one were as follows: Caring teachers; teachers with a passionate commitment to teach the subject matter; respect for students and the ability of teachers to connect with students; teachers holding high expectations for what students can achieve; collaborative leadership; and teachers helping students create a foundation for further learning. The journey of a teacher as well as the act of teaching seemed to be a fulfilling experience for the teachers and the students alike, particularly for the indigenous communities of Northeast India.

Caring teachers

Teachers held high expectations for their students and interacted with them on a personal level as well as a professional one. One of the six students reported, “My teacher makes us feel at home. She always tells us do things in a right way. She is very impartial; she treats everyone as her own child and she is the best.” A feeling of care, love, competition, and compassion permeated the hallways and classrooms of the school. Teachers appeared to be impartial, kind, and honest in their dealings with students.

Teachers appeared to be motivated, even though their salary and other benefits were minimal. One teacher remarked:

“I joined here as a teacher not for the sake of money, but to prepare the children for the future. It is a great honor to train the future generation. I will continue to work here with a very minimum salary. I have a great sense of satisfaction and joy. It is great when graduated students come back to meet with me. They express gratitude and tell me what they have done for themselves and others. It is a moment of great joy. That is what keeps me motivated and for as long as I can I will continue to teach and share my knowledge with the future generation.”

During the observation, three teachers were explicit in focusing on the positive qualities of students and praised their efforts to learn. This was corroborated by a student when she said, “My teacher makes us feel at home. She always tells us do things in a right way. She is very impartial; she treats everyone as her own child and she is the best.” Caring teachers made enormous differences in the lives of their students, thus making the learning process enjoyable and comforting. The students felt that their teachers cared for

them. Students approached teachers with their emotional problems and teachers responded to them with assistance. According to one teacher: “Most of the students do come to share their struggles which they cannot share with their own peers.”

Contextualized pedagogy

The teachers used a variety of learning activities and instructional strategies. They adjusted their instruction as necessary and engaged students in authentic exercises of reading and writing. Teachers used commonly available instructional materials, especially the blackboard, to impart learning. Teachers organized field trips, group discussions, and student projects so that students would have hands - on experiences in their learning. Teachers used indigenous images, cultural traits, indigenous literature and local socio-economic political issues in the classroom. According to one student, “my teacher is so practical when he explains things. He connects the subject matter to what is happening in our lives.” To help students understand civics lessons, the teacher took the students to nearby orphanages or to houses of the destitute. Students also got an opportunity to interact and help with chores at the place. Later, students were required to write a reflection based on their experience. During the observation, the researcher found two teachers using reflection during the instruction to deepen the students’ understanding. According to the mathematics teacher: “The project works, however small they may be, builds excitement, and engages students to be creative. They create triangles, squares and other items and measure distance and height. This type of engagement reduces the pressure students feel at school.” The challenge was always “to help the student understand the lessons and to keep the sprit of learning and adventure alive,” reported another teacher.

Mastery and thoroughness of the subject

Teachers appeared to have a mastery over the subject that was being taught. Teachers used a form of “story narration” for instruction. This method helped students to actively participate in the classroom. The observation data indicated that teachers demonstrated competence in all the academic subjects they taught at school. The teachers emphasized children’s ability to assimilate new information quickly and solve problems creatively. The teachers created an environment that instilled in students a liking for the subjects that were being taught. According to one teacher, “My challenge as a mathematics teacher is always to create an interest and liking among students towards my subject.”

Teachers appeared to prepare the lessons in advance. Three teachers had mapped out their lesson at the beginning of their class. These teachers were able to bring world issues to the classroom and relate them to the subject with ease. The teachers emanated a passion and love for their subject which inspired the students to focus against all odds.

Clarity of instruction

Teaching practices were designed to afford students opportunities to develop academic interest and a love for a particular subject. The instructions were tailored to accommodate both over- and under- achieving students. Students were individually challenged to study every day. Teachers provided the students with class notes and insisted on regular homework. During the observation, the researcher noted that all the five teachers gave homework instruction either in written or oral form. Teachers stayed beyond the school hour to help students who had difficulty in understanding the instruction of the day. The instruction was not limited to the academic life of a student but to life in general and its connectedness to nature. According to one student, “my

teacher is so practical when he explains things. He connects the subject matter to what is happening in our lives.”

Communication skills were the best tools for managing the teacher-student and teacher-parent relationship. The teachers were effective communicators in the classroom. Teachers spoke local languages and often dressed in indigenous attire, enabling them to create connectedness.

Classroom management

The teachers implemented many positive classroom management strategies that made their classes flow smoothly. This resulted in an effective use of instructional time. There were routines in place in each class which involved quizzes about the previous day's lessons, a student's reading aloud the current lesson, and the submission of homework. There was a high level of interaction within the classes. While similarities existed, each teacher used certain activities that made him or her stand out as different or unique from the others. These activities involved the entire class, even though managing such a large classroom created major challenges for the teachers. The students who did not adhere to the rules of discipline were reported to the principal. All teachers maintained a positive classroom environment.

Clear expectation by the teachers

Evaluation criteria and expectations for behavior were clearly communicated to students at the beginning of the academic year. The school handbook had a section on expectation and rules of behavior within the school campus. Students were expected to follow the code of conduct. The researcher noted the insistence on respect for all in the code. The expectation was that all students needed to graduate from high school. In order

to achieve that, every student would be challenged to demonstrate effort, initiative, and respect for each other. The school provided assistance to well deserving students. The code of conduct from the handbooks reads as follows:

“No student will be admitted to the classroom without full and proper uniform. Disrespect to teachers, elders or visitors and misconduct of any sort will be severely dealt with. Be careful to respect parents and elders and to avoid bad companions as poisonous snakes. Students should practice polite way of talking using “thank you,” “sorry,” “please,” “may,” “I’d like to have,” etc. Cases of misbehavior will not be tolerated. It is compulsory for all the students to converse in English, failure in which may be punished or fined” (School handbook p.19).

The school had clear expectations for their students and teachers. The structured school environment coupled with a caring staff may have contributed to a high level of retention.

Motivational leadership

The principal maintained a visible presence and communicated well with students, teachers, parents, and local community leaders. Teachers and staff were motivated by meaningful praise and acknowledgment. Teachers reported that they felt supported and confident to interact with the principal, not only on academic matters but also regarding their personal lives. According to one teacher, the principal was an open-minded sounding board if you wanted something different. According to another teacher: “The principal is a very dynamic person and has decentralized her powers. She has empowered teachers to organize and administer the classrooms according to the creativity

of each teacher.” The commonly expressed perception of both teachers and students was that the principal really cared about teachers and students. They also noted that the principal wanted each and every student to graduate and wanted the teachers to do everything possible to achieve that dream. The principal was open to meeting with parents who had concerns about their child. The principal also met with parents whose child had behavioral issues at school.

A diverse classroom with differentiated instruction in a positive environment of care and mutual respect challenged students to engage fully in their own learning. These classroom characteristics, supportive leadership and involvement with parents contributed this positive and creative school environment that arguably contributed to higher retention in this school.

School Number Two

Introduction

School Number Two is a high school located some distance from the capital, Shillong, Meghalaya. The region’s demographic consisted of homogeneous Khasi tribe. School Number Two became a high school in 1982. The school has around 950 students well over half girls, and the rest boys, mostly from the Khasi tribe. Grade nine has 59 girls and 24 boys while grade ten has 51 girls and 27 boys. The high school draws from 22 lower primary and two upper primary schools, located in the villages surrounding the school. There are also two boarding houses that can accommodate about 125 students.

On the first day of the researcher’s visit to the school, he met with the principal and presented to him the designated research project. The principal was very understanding and asked the researcher many questions about the scope of the research.

He expressed his willingness to assist the researcher with the research project. He also extended an invitation to be a “Guest of honor” at the upcoming school function organized in honor of the outgoing principal. Later that day, the researcher met with the teachers, gave them the materials concerning the protocol for interviews and made appointments to meet with them on the following week.

Students in this high school appeared to be warm, but shy. The school was located on the top of a mountain. According to the principal, seven students on average were absent every day, in grades nine & ten (usually, three boys & four girls). Over the last four years, the school has had a one hundred percent graduation rate. According to students, this was due to the commitment and hard work of the teachers. The teachers appeared to interact very well with the students and parents. The principal also acknowledged the commitment and hard work of students in attaining a one hundred percent graduation rate. The researcher’s movement around the school building was restricted due to the construction underway to build an audio visual room, computer lab, library and additional classrooms.

Focus Group Interview

The group interview involved seven students from grades nine and ten, three boys and four girls. Their names were selected from the class list at the recommendation of the principal. During the 75 minute interview, students were asked a variety of questions and follow-up inquiries. The questionnaire guided the interview (Appendix 2). Students were asked to share their opinions, perceptions, and reasons for liking a subject, a teacher or the school as a whole. They were also asked to comment on the dropout rates among their peers from other schools. In addition, students were asked about leadership, school

culture, and classroom experience. Three students reported that they liked Khasi language while the other four said they liked science, mathematics, English, and biology respectively.

Teacher Characteristics

Students were asked to describe characteristics of their favorite teachers, their teaching methods, and what they liked to see in a teacher. All seven students appreciated their teachers and loved them. Two of the students even had difficulty in identifying a particular teacher, since they liked all their teachers.

One student liked a particular teacher because of her thoroughness in the subject matter and her interesting use of local images to explain the subject. Another student liked the English teacher because of the way she encouraged students to learn. She also explained English grammar in way that was easy to understand and follow. Another student liked her Khasi language teacher. She said “I like her very much because she makes all of us understand it well; she also teaches us good behavior.” The main themes that emerged from the group interview were as follows: teacher- student interaction, mastery over the subject matter, and contextualized instruction.

Teacher –student Interaction

All the teachers lived near and around the school and were involved in the activities of the village and church. For this reason, students could interact with them, not only in the classroom, but also beyond it. According to one student, “On my part, I like my English teacher because when we do something wrong, she is not angry with us but gives us good advice. She speaks gently, wants us to overcome the difficulty and learn something for life.” According to another student, “I like my teacher because she teaches well. When I

cannot cope, she helps. I think, she is also of very good nature.” Yet another student reported that his teacher was a good role model to follow.

The students reported that it was easy to approach teachers and that they were very personable. All the students in the group felt that their teachers loved them and wanted them to succeed. Students in general reported that they could approach their teachers at any time for help. Three students reported that they liked their Khasi teacher because she spoke to them in a gentle voice and supported them in a crisis. Another student reported, “I like my biology teacher because she is very respectful.”

Mastery over the Subject Matter

The students felt that their teachers were qualified and knew the subject that they were teaching. According to one student, “I like my Khasi teacher because she makes all of us understand well. She also teaches us about the Khasi way of life. She explains the values and way to behave as a Khasi. She directs us to be a good person in the society.” Another student reported that he liked the mathematics teacher because he taught well and was thorough with the subject.

Contextualized Instruction

Students reported that teachers often used the local language to explain difficult lessons for students to understand. The teacher provided class notes for the students to study and prepare for the state level examination. According to one student, “It’s just because she is the teacher who teaches me well. Besides, she also knows how to make me understand well, and then... (laughs).” According to another student, “I like that particular teacher because she has the experience to teach us and we can understand better.”

If I were a Teacher

The students were also asked a follow up question such as, what would you do differently if you were a teacher? The students had different answers. One student said, “Perhaps I can do something by being good and generous from the bottom of my heart. I could do that for my own good and for the future.” Another student stated, “When I become a teacher, I will be ready to use all my talents and will try to be a role model that students can imitate.” A third student said, “I want to teach the students well and I also want to help them when they are in difficulty. I also want to teach them good manners and self-respect so that they can prosper in their lives.” A fourth student said, “I will be the one who will teach the students well. I will advise them politely and make them understand and thereafter I’ll ... help them if they find any difficulty, that’s all.” A fifth student expressed his desire to be a teacher in the following words: “What I am to do is to love them, care for them; then I will teach them well.” A sixth student said, “I also have the desire to promote good behavior, especially among the Khasi people. We seem to lose some of the age-old traditions of our tribe, particularly respect. I shall love them and take good care of them.” The last boy stated, “I shall help the school children if they encounter any difficulties; with the help of the teachers and with love, we can help and assist them in times of difficulty.” All of the students expressed their desire for good working relations between teachers and the village people.

The interview evidence suggests that students continued their education because of the effective and caring teaching methods that teachers used in the classroom. The teacher –student interaction, use of local language and images, contextualized instruction, and the teachers’ mastery of the subject coupled with the motivation and care provided by teachers encouraged students of this school to stay at school and graduate.

Perceptions Concerning the Dropout Phenomenon

In discussing the dropout rate among their peers in other schools, the students shared what they believed was the reason for the increased dropout, particularly among the students from this region. The reasons were as follows: a) Students were afraid to face the challenges, since education opened them up to a reality with which they were not familiar. This unfamiliarity frightened them, with some of them preferring to return to the traditional way of living such as living in a small farm to cultivate crops and rearing farm animals. b) Parents could not afford to send their children to school due to their poor economic situation. c) Vices. “There are many vices and they fall prey to worldly desires, especially as adolescents. They are young and do not think of the possible consequences which ultimately forces them to drop out of school.” d) Lack of enthusiasm. Even with support, some students discontinued because they did not have the heart to come to school. “There are boys and girls who preferred to loiter around rather than go to school,” said a student. f) Indifference to advice. According to another student, “There is a pride among Khasis which prevents them from listening to others.” They chose to settle down as husband and wife from a young age onwards. In some cases, parents supported the decision of these young adults. One student said, “The schools are co-educational, there is a tendency among many high school students to get involved in love affairs and some of them come to school just to meet with and see the other and to compare themselves with other students who come to school. In turn, these students become the object of admiration on the part of others, even though they are still lagging behind. But there are many who envy them and as a result, they too begin to lag behind. Eventually, they drop out of school.” g) Unbridled freedom. These students roamed about aimlessly or just

stayed at home and were not willing to confront life. h) Adolescent parenthood. One student stated that some of them bore children at a very young age and had no ability to parent them. Then both parents had to drop out of school to care for the child and often these children are raised without adequate care or food. When these “parent-children” came to school, they had no motivation or intellectual ability to carry on their education.

The new rule about expulsion from school and payment of a fine in cases of “*abkuriam*” (sexual intercourse) was a great deterrent for a few who otherwise would have dropped out of school earlier because of their adolescent behavior. Four of the students felt that the village and school needed to collaborate more in order to reduce dropout by rendering assistance and providing adequate resources. The dropout rate also could be reduced by creating new rules, a better education program about sex, and by encouraging the village to get more involved in the welfare of the children.

“Elopement” (running away of boy & girl who are in love) was another matter of serious concern. To prevent such occurrences, there should be certain rules that impose fines besides expulsion from school. All the students felt that the village needed to stand by the school to create an atmosphere of excellence, rooted in high morality. The school also needed to provide counseling services besides academic help. The school in collaboration with the tribe also needed to abolish child or early marriages. Rules needed to be created in regard to the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and smoking. These rules needed to be enforced strictly, both at home and in school.

The students felt that school authorities needed to be more respectful and should have an open discussion about the abovementioned issues with their parents. This would ultimately help reduce the dropout rate among the students.

The interview data on the perceptions concerning drop out rates among the indigenous students of this region seem to indicate that there are a few external reasons contributing to dropout rates such as poverty, addiction to alcohol and/or tobacco, indifference to education, sense of false pride as tribal, adolescent sexual activity, and early parenthood. The unfamiliarity of knowledge and exposure to education brings the indigenous students to forces that seem to make it easier to drop out of school. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that even though these challenging factors exist in the region, the students at this school are able to carry on with their education due to the caring and supportive educational environment of the school.

Teacher Interviews

The researcher had interviews with each teacher for over an hour. With the permission of the principal the researcher conducted these interviews at the school during the school hours. The teachers were selected according to the subjects that they were teaching. The researcher interviewed one English teacher, two mathematics teachers, one science teacher, and one social education teacher. The teachers were contacted in advance. Once they agreed to participate in the interview, they were provided with the consent forms. The researcher went through the consent form in detail with each individual teacher and offered him or her ample opportunities to ask questions and seek clarifications. The teachers at this school spoke many languages. Khasi, Mizo and Hindi were some of the languages the teachers spoke at school. All the teachers were able to speak more than one language. After the teachers signed the form, the conversations were tape recorded and later transcribed. In order to protect the identity of the teachers, codes were used when receiving the documents and reporting the findings.

Perceptions of Teaching Practices

The English and the science teachers stated that they did not depend only on books prescribed by the MBOSE (Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education) but also got books that helped students understand the subject better. The students had very little mastery over the English language. Teachers encouraged them to speak English, especially during the school hours, even though their natural tendency was to speak in their native tongue. Even though the instruction was in English, the teacher said she also used the local language to explain the subject taught. According to the English teacher, “We encourage them to speak English. However, they speak in Khasi most of the time. It is a challenge. As teachers, we have often needed to speak in the local language to help students understand the subject. We give the meaning in Khasi to explain things to them, but otherwise we use English.”

There was no modern technology available for teachers at the school. The teachers used blackboards extensively. They asserted that they provided the students with class notes in the form of questions and answers. Usually teachers dictated these notes while they walked around the classroom and observed how students were writing down the dictated notes. The teachers indicated that they looked for accuracy in note-taking at the end of the class hour. Then the following day the teacher would ask the students questions, mainly on the dictated notes. According to the math teacher, “I just encourage them, even if the answer is wrong; they have to provide me with an answer.” If the student failed to provide an answer, they were asked to write down the question and answer one hundred times. When a student failed to answer on the following day, the student might have to stand outside the classroom for the rest of the class hour. The

teacher found that this method of discipline worked because “the student felt encouraged to study.”

The researcher inquired about the emotional aspects of the described student, especially when the student was watched by many other students. The math teacher’s answer was: “They don’t feel anything.” The researcher then asked if a student’s lack of shame was the result of other psychological issues. The teacher seemed to suggest that though a student felt bad, feeling that way actually helped the student to focus on his/her studies better. As a result, students did not stand outside the classroom often. In cases of repeated patterns of failure, the teacher met with the student separately to find out what was occurring in his or her life. Students did feel comfortable when they met with their teacher in these situations. Three teachers reported that, if the issue with the disciplined student could not be handled in the class, then the teachers referred the student to the principal for further action.

All teachers reported that they encouraged the underperforming students after class hours. The teachers also urged them to study better and helped these students to realize that they would have no good future if the study requirements were not met. According to two teachers, the students who were held back in the same grade were expected eventually to drop out of school. However, more and more did not drop out because of the encouragement they received from their teachers. School leadership also helped when the student repeated the grade; in most cases, they did well and graduated to the next class the following year.

According to the math and social science teacher, project work generated lots of excitement and engagement among students. Measuring the height of a building or the

height of the basketball hoop using the triangle was intellectually stimulating. Another project in mathematics sent students to cemeteries to collect the birth and death dates on the tombstones, and to calculate the average age of individuals who died in the past 10 years. This exercise generated a lot of interesting discussion in class. For example, many of the people in the cemeteries who died were very young. This caused the students to reflect on the reasons for their death. All the teachers reported that generally, many students were too shy to ask questions in class, but projects like these enabled them to participate. In the long run, they were able to develop better learning skills as a result of these projects. Two teachers mentioned that the constraints of the syllabus, however, could limit the possibility of similar work projects in the future. Students had to be prepared for the state level examinations to graduate from high school. According to both teachers, curriculum prescribed by the state did not include any work projects at all.

According to the English teacher, upgrading one's teaching skills was essential when dealing with a young growing generation. According to three teachers, the teenagers of today are different from those of 10 years ago. Students had more problems that were unsolved in the home environment. If teachers were not able to help students deal with these problems, it became difficult to help students focus on their studies. Meeting with a student in a different environment other than the formal classroom enabled a teacher to break down the barriers.

According to the social science teacher, "A teacher can really shape the life of a student. There is no limit to what a teacher can do, provided you want to do it; that is the important thing." There was also the constraint of time created by the large number of students in a single class. To reach out to each of them was really a challenge.

All the teachers said that there were a few students who were slow learners and found it difficult to follow the class. These students met with their teachers after school hours or during lunch break. Very few students came from families where either one or the other parent was educated. The vast majority of the slow learners were the first generation in their families to go to school. Apart from the teachers, these students did not have access to any other resources to assist them to understand the subject matter they covered in class. According to science teacher, “These students need a kind of guidance that will help them focus on their current curriculum while not losing sight of the future.” The math teacher added, “As teachers we are called to nurture a strong will-power and determination among students while guiding them to use their time effectively. This attitude of teachers has produced one hundred percent graduation rates in our schools.” The second math teacher stated, “I know that after going back home, no one is there to make them understand. It is my duty to make them understand. I try my best to explain nicely in a way that they can understand easily.” All the teachers talked about the time constraints they faced in reaching out to the students. However, a good number of teachers were willing to sacrifice their free time to teach, especially for the underperforming students. The researcher can corroborate this statement, as he witnessed the presence of numerous students during the lunch break in the staff room. These students were engaged in active conversations with their teachers.

According to the English teacher, “it is easy to know if the vast majority of the students are following what is being taught. If they do not understand, you can tell. Then I try different ways of explaining the subject. I even use the local language and images to help them understand the subject.” The social science teacher declared, “I call them by

their names while asking them questions.” Four teachers reported that calling students by name enabled them to focus their attention in class. According to the teachers, the students felt bad about their inability to answer the question promptly. In most cases, however, they took this as a challenge and prepared themselves to answer well on the next given opportunity.

The interview data of the teachers seemed to indicate that effective teaching practices had enabled students to take responsibility for their learning. The teaching practices that seemed to improve learning and teaching were the following: speaking English within the school campus; use of the local language to explain difficult subjects; use of a blackboard coupled with providing class notes; consistency in asking questions to students from regular homework; punishment for failure to provide right answers; project works in groups; assistance after the school hours; continuous learning by the teacher; assistance in dealing with emotional issues of the students; motivation provided through different programs to study; and learning the strengths and challenges of each individual student as well as addressing his/her individual needs. One could argue from the evidence that the motivation and support provided by the teachers had enhanced the retention at this particular school.

Teachers' Perception of School Leadership

All teachers interviewed were supportive of the school leadership. According to the teachers, the school leadership had been effective in guiding the school to achieve a one hundred percent retention and graduation rate. According to teachers, the principal spent lots of time with teachers, parents, and village leaders, motivating them to help the students graduate. Each of the teachers shared their experiences of support, guidance,

and supervision received from those in charge. The teachers experienced school leadership as friendly and cordial, creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence. All the teachers felt that they needed to be paid a better salary and given more benefits. However, teachers were likewise aware that the school leadership alone could not make such a decision. The teachers were also asked about the changes they might bring about if they were appointed to a school leadership position. The following are some of their answers:

Create a more inclusive school policy.

Create opportunities for games and organized sports.

Introduce music, theater and other arts to enable all-round development.

Create more opportunities for refresher courses for teachers.

Identify special talents among teachers and entrust more responsibilities to them.

Create programs to handle stress both among teachers & students.

The above data seemed to indicate that teachers' and students' perception of the school leadership was demanding but friendly and cordial, creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence. These factors may also have contributed towards reducing dropout at this school. The presence of an empowering and guiding leadership was probably vital to graduate one hundred percent of the students.

Teacher Perception of the Dropout Phenomenon

Dropout in this particular school was a very rare phenomenon. All the same, teachers were asked to share their thoughts on the dropout rate among the indigenous people of Northeast India. According to one teacher, the reason that the dropout rate affected senior classes was due to the students' lack of foundation. Students needed to be given more

assistance in the lower grades to prevent dropouts at a higher level. If they had a poor foundation in the beginning, they were more liable to fail later on. These students could do well in mathematics, provided the fear of failure is removed. “These students play musical instruments so well and I am sure they can do well in mathematics, but fear keeps them from trying,” said one of the math teachers. Fear of failure was best addressed by providing a strong foundation in the lower grades.

Another reason for dropping out, according to a teacher, was staying in the same grade. Failure brought additional burdens to the family which often could not afford the cost to begin with. “The family determines that the child is not able to study, so why waste money,” reported the fifth teacher. “They believe the little money they have can be used for something else.”

“Families have many children and parents often find it hard to provide for their education. It is important to have a girl child as is the custom of the tribe, so the mother needs to bear as many children as she can till she can have a baby girl,” said the fourth teacher. As is the custom in the tribe, the girls of the tribe have the ownership of the home and all the property. Boys had no ownership and had a tendency not to produce or work hard beyond the requirement for simple living.

Poverty was a major contributing factor to dropping out. Three teachers attributed “poor work culture” as a cause for dropping out. According to her, the students and their parents were not willing to work hard. Students kept neglecting their studies; they got involved in many other things, thus losing their focus on study. Children were often encouraged by parents to work in the field and to graze cattle during the day. Because of

these activities, students regularly were absent from school, which ultimately caused them to drop out.

Teachers' comments pointed to a pessimistic trend taken by boys. Another factor was their view of the future. For many, there was no future. There was nothing to look forward to. Boys could not buy or own property. The children belonged to the mother. After marriage, boys had to move to girl's home. If there was a disagreement, the husband would be thrown out of the house, losing everything. Boys tended to take no responsibility, right from childhood, including the responsibility to study. From an early age onwards, boys also developed a love for tobacco and alcohol. Parents felt that they had very little control once the children reached the eighth or ninth grade. As a result, some students dropped out of school for an easy life.

Teachers felt that poor teaching or poor administration was another set of factors that caused students to dropout. According to some to some teachers, strict discipline was not often enforced in the schools due to the changing cultural environment. According to teacher number one, "We have totally done away with corporal punishment and have not come up with a viable solution to enforce discipline at the school." The teacher continued, "At a management meeting, I raised the point concerning the boys wearing their trousers below their knees and I was told that we cannot enforce extreme discipline anymore." Three teachers reported that a common policy of dress code and behavior might help to enforce discipline, which would ultimately yield a greater retention rate.

Another contributing factor according to a teacher was brokenness in the family. It was a new phenomenon in this part of the world. The youngsters from these broken

families were often very disturbed. They found it hard to focus on their education. Their deviant behavior got them on the wrong side of the code of discipline that ultimately led to expulsion from the school. This was a further challenge.

The interview data seems to indicate that lack of foundation and failure in a course contributed to the phenomenon of dropout. In the case of this school, these issues seemed to have been addressed effectively, leading to one hundred percent graduation over the last four years. The external factors that contributed to dropout according to the findings were poverty, poor work culture, addiction to tobacco or alcohol and field work. Even though these contributing factors existed in these village communities, the evidence showed that there were no dropouts at this school. This could be attributed to the effective assistance provided by the school or to drastic economic or social change in the surroundings.

Teachers' Comments around Classroom Management

All the teachers agreed that having a large number of students in a classroom put a major constraint on effective group discussions. In spite of this, teachers liked to have group discussions within the class period. Environmental science engaged students in interesting discussions. The subject was so real, at times, that it became a challenge to conclude such engaging discussions without erupting into violence. The teacher regretted that the students did not have more such opportunities to discuss issues pertinent to their lives, especially as indigenous people. Due to lack of time, the researcher requested assistance from another principal of a school (neighboring state) to observe the class and to submit a report using the same protocol used in the other schools.

Classroom Observation

Only a handful of students could speak English fluently, but all of them were able to understand English. The substitute observer observed an English class where the teacher was teaching a poem. The teacher read the poem aloud twice, explained line by line, and then called on a few students to read the poem. When the observer entered the classroom, the black board was filled with writings. There were meanings assigned to each word and their functions in the poem. When the observer reached the classroom, the teacher was not present but the students were writing down notes taken from the blackboard. During the class, the teacher read the passage and explained it to students. The other class the observer visited was the mathematics class. The teacher was working out problems that appeared in the students' last school test. The lesson plan was mapped out on the board by four teachers to help students understand what they were expected to learn on that day. One of the mathematics teachers had not mapped out a lesson plan on the board. Two of the teachers made a good transition from the previous day's lesson to the lesson of the day. Three of the five teachers (excluding the science teacher) reviewed major concepts from the previous day's instruction. These teachers called on one or two students to explain those concepts. Then the teachers explained them further. Once the teachers offered reasons for the concepts, then each teacher broadened their application and connected them to that day's instruction.

The following chart provides a summary of both the researcher's and the substitute observer's observations:

Table 4.2 Classroom observation data

		T – 1	T – 2	T – 3	T – 4	T – 5
		E	M	M	S	SS
01.	Did the teacher MAP OUT the lesson on the board?	Yes	yes	No	yes	Yes
02.	Measures taken to ensure successful TRANSITION.	No	yes	yes	No	No
03.	Did the teacher REVIEW the major concepts from the previous lesson and ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE?	Yes	yes	yes	No	yes
04.	Did the teacher explain the PURPOSE of today’s lesson clearly and accurately?	No	No	Yes	No	No
05.	Did the teacher ask PROCESSING QUESTIONS throughout today’s lesson to CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING?	Yes	yes	No	Yes	No
06.	Did the teacher take five minutes at the end of class to SUMMARIZE today’s learning?	No	Yes	No	yes	yes
07.	Did the teacher ask the students to REFLECT on what they learned?	No	yes	yes	No	No
08.	Did the teacher assign work in a VERBAL or WRITTEN form?	Written	Written	Both	Written	Both
09.	Did the teacher model all the strategies, behaviors, etc?	No	No	No	No	Yes
10.	Did the teacher consciously support the students by focusing on their POSITIVE qualities and PRAISING their efforts?	Not sure	No	yes	Not sure	Yes
11.	Did the teacher handle PROBLEMS quickly and discreetly, treating students with RESPECT and FAIRNESS?	Yes	Not sure	yes	yes	Not sure
12.	Did the teacher create a safe, supportive ENVIRONMENT in which students could grow and learn?	Not sure	Yes	Not sure	Yes	Not sure
13.	Did the teacher emphasize the “SPECIALNESS” of each individual student and the group as a whole?	Yes	yes	No	yes	No

(E= English teacher one, S = Science teacher, SS = Social science teacher, M = Mathematics teacher)

Only one teacher appeared to be clear about what they were doing and where they were going, though that teacher had not mapped out the lesson in the beginning. The teacher was able to communicate it verbally. Three of the five teachers asked many questions to the students. Some of these questions were asked in the local language and students answered them in the local language.

The English and one of the math teachers ended the class at the stroke of the bell. However, the other three summarized what they taught that day. All the teachers gave the students homework to be done for the following day. The interactions were very informal, but only two teachers consciously applauded the students for their hard work. Three of the five teachers were effective in creating an environment of learning without much effort. It came to them so naturally. Three teachers in very clear terms reminded them about their privilege to be at the school and called on them to work hard.

Though these observations were limited, when coupled with the student and teacher interaction, they provided the researcher with a limited idea of how the teachers at this school imparted knowledge and skill to the students. The presence of someone from outside generated a certain amount of nervousness among the students and teachers. However, the teachers were very cooperative and wanted to know how schools functioned in others parts of the world.

Later, the observer had an opportunity to observe a parent- teacher meeting. The language of the conversation was Khasi. The parents were expressing concern for their children's schedule in regard to the beginning of the school year. At the end of the meeting, the school authorities decided to start school late by an hour to accommodate the parents' need for the children to cultivate the potato crop in their villages. These

meetings were very engaging. The meeting lasted over 2 hours. Over 300 hundred parents were present at the hall for the meeting.

Summary of findings in School Number Two

The following themes emerged from the findings in this school. Themes were centered on a) teacher-student interaction, b) contextualized pedagogy, c) effective leadership, d) support services.

Student-teacher interaction

The school appeared to operate as a large community. As teachers, administrators, parents, and students, they seemed to have a close connection both during and after school hours. The teachers seemed to know each student and his/her family. Prior to the school hours, the researcher observed a few teachers standing outside the building and interacting with students. It appeared that teachers with various communication strategies generated different types of relationships. Some teachers appeared to be more businesslike while others appeared lenient. Some were distant and others friendly. Teachers seemed to be the first people aware of the personal problems of their students. The researcher understood that students directly sought their teachers' help, guidance or some kind of explanation for their problems. Findings indicate that teachers translated their inter-connectedness with students into effective teaching strategies to create an environment of teaching and learning.

Contextualized pedagogy

Teachers reported that they made attempts to create a connection between what the students were learning and how they lived. Teaching was sometimes done in the local language to enable students to get a better grasp of the subject matter that was being

taught. Findings indicate that teachers planned their lesson and incorporated into the lesson local literature and folk stories. Teachers developed small projects which were outside the syllabus to make learning both engaging and interactive. Group projects tended to nurture the team spirit which teachers developed into a pedagogy that had content, local ethos, and world views that could be integrated into the learning situation. This integration provided a unique fit, particularly in creating a learning environment that had a minimal dropout rate.

Effective leadership

Teachers reported that they experienced a new outlook towards learning and teaching at the arrival of a new principal four years ago. The teachers and students alike were challenged by the principal to be responsible and committed to learning and teaching. From the first year of arrival, the new principal worked in collaboration with all stake-holders to reduce the dropout from an earlier 30 % rate to zero. Accountability was key for the principal. The principal met with teachers, village elders, religious leaders, and political leaders to help the school with the resources needed to educate their children. The principal connected with students and teachers. According to the principal, leadership was more about “being” than doing because the “doing” alone did not provide needed credibility. The school community had to be motivated by the inner commitment and character of the leadership. The leadership realized this early on. As a result, all the teachers and students described the leadership as caring, loving, firm, approachable, and as another team player. The principal’s positive inner values translated into positive action.

Support services

The school offered support services to students to stay at school. Many of the children were provided with financial assistance to help them stay at school. The teachers provided additional care and attention to the underperforming students. The parents cooperated with the school to help students have a better education.

Teachers reported that they provided coaching for students who needed help after school.

Teachers reported doing lots of remedial teaching to help students keep up with the syllabus. Teachers continuously motivated students by making them aware of the economic challenges they faced if they did not have a high school diploma. Once teachers identified the potential dropouts from among the student population, the school reached out to them to restore confidence and to provide them with the necessary resources to succeed.

School Number Three

School Number Three was established in 1970. It is located in a small town along the national highway, in the state of Nagaland. The school had enrolled a little under 600 students, almost equally divided between boys and girls, from grades five to ten. The school had eighteen teachers. Even though all the teachers had academic qualifications to teach at school, only five teachers out of eighteen had earned a bachelor of education as per the requirement of the state board of education. The senior most teachers at the school were appointed in 1990. Six teachers have taught at this school only since 2008, six other teachers since 2007, and the rest from 2002 and 2006 respectively. According to the principal, the remoteness of the location, the ongoing ethnic conflict, and better prospects at the city hindered recruiting and retaining teachers at this school. The school had the

following retention and graduation rates. According to the Result Gazette(2008, 2007, 2006), 87% of the students graduated in 2008, 97% in 2007, and 90% in 2006. The school also had a “common minimum program” consisting of a) zero tolerance for failure, b) accompaniment of students (consistent monitoring of the student’s progress), c) competency in English. The school diary noted that the school took pride in the following goals for students (2008, p 3):

1. to search for truth
2. to be always friendly with one another and never hate anyone
3. to accept whatever work is assigned to us as our sacred duty and responsibility
4. to be honest and sincere in all our dealings
5. to rise and greet our teachers and visitors
6. to be courteous and respectful to all, especially our elders
7. to help any unattended visitors we happen to meet on the school premises
8. to appreciate the beauty of our school and its surroundings
9. to have an open mind and heart in our studies and in all the other scholastic activities

The researcher had to travel fifteen hours by road from his research base to arrive at school number three. The school community was very welcoming. The students came forward to greet and welcome the researcher to their school. The researcher spent a week at the school meeting with the principal, students, and teachers and observing the classroom. The principal met with the researcher on the morning of the first day. The principal wanted to know more about the research project. The principal also asked the researcher many questions regarding the US educational system. Once those questions

were answered, the researcher was allowed to meet with teachers for a brief period of time. The teachers were given the interview protocol and the researcher made individual appointments to meet with each of them for an interview.

Focus Group Interviews

On the second day of the visit, the researcher met with students in a focus group. The students were speaking English, but according to the pronunciation and idiom of many local languages. The students were very friendly and warm. The researcher met with six students for a focus group interview. The students were selected from grades nine and ten at the recommendation of the principal. The interview protocol (cf. Appendix B) guided the process of discussion and inquiry. The interview lasted about 75 minutes. The following were the main themes that emerged out of the group interviews.

Subjects Students like most

One student liked Mathematics because it was interesting. According to this student, “Once you have learned the formula, it is easy to follow up and study.” Another student stated, “Many of the Naga students are weak in mathematics. Therefore I want to learn mathematics to be able to teach other Nagas that mathematics is not as difficult as it is thought to be.”

A third student liked science because of its vital role in the development of any part of the world. Social science was more important for another student since it provided knowledge about the world and how it functioned. All three students liked English because it taught them many things about grammar and because people of the northeast were not fluent in English. They hoped that their education would help them later.

Students seemed to like these subjects because of their usefulness for the future. It also appeared that students liked these subjects because of the challenge they provided for the people of that region. Students wanted to master these subjects in order to assist their community in its pursuit of progress. The student response seemed to provide evidence for the need of a pedagogy which created a sustained interaction between teacher and students, and a curriculum, which challenged students in their daily lives while creating options for the future.

What do Students like about a Teacher?

One student stated, “I like my English teacher. The English teacher not only teaches the subject but is also concerned about the problems of the students. The teacher provides us with knowledge of the world. He also advises us about the world and how to face the challenges of the world.” Another student liked the social science teacher because “he not only teaches what is in the chapter but also provides us additional and related knowledge. He encourages us to go beyond the chapters, to learn more about their implications for life, and to develop skills that will enable us to deal with others and with other things.”

Together they said the following about a good teacher:

The teacher makes the subject likeable.

The teacher makes connections with what is happening around us.

The teacher makes the class interesting and inspiring.

The teacher is very expressive and has a convincing way of teaching.

The teacher communicates well.

The teacher is frank and is convincing.

The teacher has a deep knowledge of the subject and is able to share his knowledge

The teacher is a people person.

The teacher is able to handle fights in class in a very effective way.

The teacher is able to share his/her personal experience with the students.

The teacher brings to the class relevant issues that affect the region.

Mastery over the Subject

Students acknowledged that many of their teachers were well versed in their subjects and had the ability to communicate that knowledge in simple and clear terms. According to one student, “I like my social science teacher because he makes teaching so simple and it is easy to cope with. He knows his subject well.” According to a second student, “I like my science teacher because of the way she expresses and communicates with the class. She is frank and has the ability to share her knowledge in a way that we can easily understand.”

Caring and Compassionate

According to three students, a caring and compassionate attitude was an important quality for teachers. One student said, “I like my English teacher because she not only teaches what is in the book but shares with us some of her personal experiences.” All the students in the group expressed that their teacher cared for them and loved them. Even though there were occasional confrontations, they were dealt with in the “spirit of love and understanding.” Teachers also dealt with issues of discipline in class with care, particularly when it related to small tribes. According to a fourth student:

“Sometimes, we face these kinds of conflicts, between different tribes – among tribes, and the majority, the major tribes will try to look down upon the minor tribe. If any person of the minor tribe, does something

wrong, then the major tribes take advantage of the minority and try to show their will over the minorities; this is how conflict occurs between different tribes. Then fighting may break out either in or outside the classroom. Once the teachers are aware of the issue, they handle it well, bringing better understanding and closeness between groups.”

According to the students, a caring teacher was the one who could manage the classroom and create an environment of learning. “Teachers here are very down- to -earth and we can approach them without any fear,” reported another student.

Worldview and Interconnectedness

Students said that their teachers did not just teach the subject, but also related it to the events happening in the world. According to a fifth student

“My teacher not only teaches what is in the chapter but provides us with practical knowledge of what is happening around us. [The] teacher shows us how our lives are connected to what occurs in the world. The teacher also helps us to deal with new knowledge and shows us how we can use that knowledge to improve our lives.”

The data drawn from student group interviews provided evidence that students would stay at school if the teacher was caring, compassionate and had a deeper knowledge of his or her subject. The subject became relevant and engaging for students when the teachers were able to connect what they were studying to local and international issues. Student engagement coupled with a caring environment seemed to provide the recipe for higher retention rate at this school.

The above descriptions and comments by students also provided evidence of commitment and professionalism at this school. The students seem to stay at school because of the care and support they received from their teachers. The school also seemed to provide an opportunity for students to connect their learning to local and global situations. Students seemed to recognize that what they learned had long term implications for their lives.

Perception about Dropout Rate

“A student drops out of school because he or she is not good at studies,” was the immediate answer from most of the group when the researcher raised the issue of dropout. Yet another said, the students who dropped out were lazy and did not want to put the effort into studies. He believed some students gave up easily without even trying. The students who dropped out also had issues with their behavior.

According to one student, “Nagas are less patient and get discouraged. We give up very easily. There is no second chance in Naga culture. If we do not succeed in the first attempt, there is no second try. First try is like the final.” Also, “When other students do better than them, they feel that they are inferior or secondary to them. They feel bad and because of this attitude they drop out of school.” According to another student,

“Some students do not have a good relationship with the teacher. As a result, they have no interest in that subject and therefore do not study. They also keep postponing until the end when they cannot cope with what needs to be studied. Not surprisingly, they fail in the examination. Once they have failed, students feel ashamed to return to school.”

According to three students in the group, today's younger generation also lacked respect for their elders. Some students were not willing to listen to their elders or accept their wisdom. The media had a major influence on these students. A few students consumed alcohol and drugs to look smart. They learned this from the media. Consumption of alcohol and drugs strained their relationships with their parents. Normally parents checked the student diary for information from the school. However, the break in the relationship created a gap in relating to one another, which ultimately led to expulsion from school.

According to two students, the students who were not interested in study spent much of their time hunting wild animals in the forests. Their stories of different encounters in the forest created an interest in other high school students, inducing them to join too. Eventually these dropped out of school. In some cases, the researcher was told that parents had no means to support their children's education and often encouraged them to drop out of school.

According to three students, many students in the classroom found the curriculum difficult and challenging. Some of them had also developed an alternative interest in movies, games, and music. Their involvement in these activities reduced their interest in education. As a result, some of them failed in difficult subjects and would eventually drop out of school.

Finally, some students in the group were really determined to study and become great in their society. They felt that only by studying could they help their people to improve their lives. These students were grateful that they had this opportunity to study at this school.

These comments showed that although these students were familiar with other students who had dropped out of school, they were determined to stay and succeed in school. The evidence indicates that students remained at school, despite all the challenges, because of the relationship they cultivated with their teachers and the supportive environment the school provided for them.

Teacher Interviews

The researcher had interviews with five teachers who were teaching mainly from grade six to ten. The teachers were selected based on the subjects they were teaching and at the recommendation of the principal. The interviews lasted over an hour and were held during the school hours. The researcher interviewed two English teachers, two mathematics teachers, and one science teacher. These teachers taught grades six through ten. The teachers were contacted in advance. Once they agreed to participate in the interview, they were provided with the consent forms. The researcher went through the consent form in detail with each teacher and offered him or her ample opportunities to ask questions and seek clarifications. The teachers were requested to sign the consent forms in order to participate in the in-depth interview. The interview protocol was the same that the researcher used in the other two schools. After the teachers signed the form, the conversations were tape recorded and later transcribed. In order to protect the identity of the teachers, code names were assigned before analyzing and reporting the findings.

The researcher found the teachers to be very engaging. All the teachers of the school were from local areas and had their graduate degrees from local universities. Many of the teachers had toured other parts of India and had seen how schools functioned elsewhere. The teachers were determined to make their institution the best in the state.

Teachers were very enthusiastic and wanted to know more about different aspects of teaching and learning. Many of the teachers were young graduates just out of college. The researcher observed a mother carrying a child to school. Such determination revealed to the researcher her firmness of purpose to finish school.

Description of Teaching Practices

The two English teachers described how they helped students to understand the background of each chapter or story before beginning a new lesson. Once the background was explained, the content was read aloud to help students grasp the pronunciation, punctuation, and tone of the piece. According to one English teacher, if the lesson could be put to music, the students would grasp it very easily. Once the reading was over, the lesson was explained, paragraph by paragraph. After explaining each paragraph, time was allotted for questions and answers. The teacher then asked the students a variety of questions to measure each student's comprehension and retention of the lesson. On the following day, students were asked again about the lesson of the previous day to ensure that they understood what was being taught to them. If most of the students understood, then the teacher continued with the next lesson. Both the teachers noted that attention was often paid to the weaker students to get them to keep pace with the rest of the class.

According to the science teacher, "I invite two students to read the lesson aloud in the class. One of them may not read well. Then the lesson is again explained to help all students understand it better." The students were also provided with class notebooks to copy material from the blackboard at the beginning of the class. Different types of spelling games were organized in the class to help students learn spelling and to comprehend scientific terms. Many of the students struggled with the correct spelling of

English words. The science teacher reported that text books provided by the school board of the state did not have adequate or detailed information to teach these students. For example, the teacher tried to get pictographically prepared books. These kinds of books at least provided students with a little understanding of the subject that was being taught. Most of the lessons, however, were alien to these students, with the editors and authors of the texts obviously unfamiliar with the cultures. Nevertheless, students looked at the pictures of the pictographic books and shared with one another in an effort to broaden their understanding of the material. This sharing helped them to build confidence among themselves to learn as best they could. Repetition in spelling helped students to memorize the correct spelling of a word. Every two weeks a spelling test was conducted in the class.

Group discussions were organized and different groups were divided in such a way as to create a balance among competing groups. This was done by placing weak and bright students side by side. These discussions enabled students to have a greater grasp of the subject. Students exhibited their learning through creative art and drama. All benefited.

According to one English teacher, “It is God’s grace that is helping our students graduate. As teachers we only can do so much, but with God’s help so much more is being done.” The teacher encouraged students to pray before and after school. She treated her students as members of her extended family. The teacher had a brother in the same high school where she was teaching, but she claimed that she was impartial and treated all equally at school. The “connectedness,” according to the teacher, helped students to work hard at the subject she was teaching.

According to one math teacher, the rearrangement of classroom seating on regular rotation basis helped students to focus on the lesson that was being taught. A change of location allowed students to be more focused on their lesson and less playful. There were times when the teacher invited all the students to stand up for a period of time to break the monotony, particularly towards the afternoon.

The second math teacher reported that she punished students sometimes by asking them to write lessons numerous times. According to this teacher, if students failed to write the lessons, then they were asked to stand at the back of the classroom during the class hour. The math teacher reported that she often positioned herself close to the chairs of the underperforming students to ensure that they stayed focused in the class.

According to the math teacher, all teachers asked their students questions about the lessons taught on the previous day.

The second English teacher said that the lesson was read aloud at the beginning of the class, helping students to learn the pronunciation of each word. Once the reading was over, the teacher explained the content, paragraph by paragraph. When the explanation was completed, a student was called upon to read. This process, according to the teacher, helped students stay attentive in class and enabled them to pick up the correct pronunciation of each word. The teacher reported that all the teachers tried to make eye contact with students, even though this practice was unusual among the Nagas.

According to the teacher, if the teacher for a moment turned his or her attention away from students, some of them would engage in playful activities. The teacher explained that most of the students did not look up at the teacher so the teacher had to repeatedly

ask students to look up at him or her to ensure that they were following what was being taught.

Other than during preparations for the final state level examinations, teachers tended not to help students after school hours. If a student wanted additional help, the teacher provided it according to his or her schedule during the day. Lunch hour was often set aside to help students who needed additional help. A few teachers of the school helped students who lived at the boarding house. Some of these students came from far-flung villages and did not have to travel.

One of the math teachers remained at school everyday until 4:30 pm (school closed at 3:00pm) to help any students who required additional help. According to this teacher, “The students need to genuinely seek help. The teachers can not enforce it. Once a student is determined to graduate, he or she will approach the teacher with a certain sincerity.” Such students were open to learn and easy to guide. However, the underperforming students first of all needed to be motivated, and then helped with their studies. The school had many programs and camps to motivate these students to succeed in school and afterwards in life, said the math teacher.

The other math teacher found that almost all students were uninterested and paid very little attention to mathematics. According to this teacher, “Students believe that they simply don’t have the natural talent to learn mathematics.” The challenge according to this teacher, was to help students believe that they could do math and to engage them in class while teaching the subject. Developing a liking for mathematics was not a small task. Once the teacher was able to help students build a liking for mathematics, then it became much easier to teach them. To achieve this, teachers engaged students with

mathematical games at the beginning of each semester. Sometime the teacher brought into class real life situations. As a result, learning mathematics had become fun in her class. The teacher reported that “I have to work with them in every class, emphasizing the necessity to learn mathematics and its application to everyday life, even in a rural village.” Motivation had to be inculcated among students all the time.

The English teacher said that teachers motivated students with their own life examples. Teachers for example, discussed with students the struggle they had growing up in a village and reaching the city to get a graduate degree. Most of the teachers drew examples from their own life environment to show students the usefulness of different subjects, especially when one was lost in a local forest. For example, one had to calculate distance, direction, and time to get out of the forest. The teacher likewise often brought to a student’s attention the struggles of his or her parents and their family. Creating an awareness of their suffering helped students sustain their ambition to be somebody great in the future.

The second math teacher reported that his students had a math phobia. The teacher had been teaching math for the past five years. According to the teacher, “They are like a circus elephant. Circus elephants from a young age are being trained with a rod. Even when they grow big, still they are afraid of the rod. I have been trying for the past five years with very little success. They continue to believe that they cannot succeed in mathematics and science. I am still evolving new techniques in my mind to teach them.”

Underachievers and slow learners required lots of attention. It was important for them to learn enough to get through state level examinations. They would not be able to graduate from high school without passing the state level mathematics examination. These students also had to be helped continuously with their study skills.

According to the science teacher, “Most of the children love to come to school. I don’t know of anybody who doesn’t want to come to school. Even after they graduate from here, they come to visit us.” The teacher reported that a former student who was selected to be an IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer came to visit the teachers and to thank them for their support and guidance. According to this teacher, this was a sign that students liked our school; otherwise, “why bother to come back,” reported the teacher.

The interview data seems to suggest that the teachers played a vital role in retaining students at school. The various teaching practices such as providing an explanation for the background of the lessons, regular interaction with students in the form of questions and answers, having lessons read aloud, spelling games, using pictorial books, and punishing those who had not done their homework all created an environment of energetic learning and teaching. The availability and the motivation provided by teachers for students seemed to be evident in the teacher as well as student interview data.

Teachers’ Perception of Leadership

All the teachers expressed great satisfaction and regard for the leadership of the principal. The teachers felt that they had received support, guidance, and direction from the principal. According to the teachers, the principal did a lot for the school. He even had substitutes for teachers who were absent from school. The principal was always seen

in the hallways and in classrooms. The principal reminded teachers of their mission and of the significance of educating students, particularly those students from the far-flung villages.

According to most of the teachers, the principal interacted with students and was very close to them. Though firm in implementing policies for the good of the school, the principal was compassionate. Most of the teachers were edified by the commitment, long hours of work, and dedication of the principal. He was available to meet with teachers, students, and parents alike. He was also respectful while dealing with different sections of the school. He was willing to cooperate and expected the same from all teachers. Whenever teachers faced a difficult situation, he was there to guide, support, and protect. He was very impartial and dealt with all teachers, without exception. According to teacher number five, he was very truthful and wanted all children to be truthful, courageous, and honest in adhering to the values of their tribe.

Many of the teachers agreed that the school was able to graduate ninety percent of its students due to the efforts of the principal. According to them, he worked tirelessly, particularly during the annual examination days. He encouraged, helped, and motivated students to study hard and perform well at the examinations. According to all the teachers interviewed, the principal had a vision and knew what he was doing.

When teachers were asked about the changes they would bring about if they had an opportunity to be principal, one teacher reported, "I would try to look for more resources to help faculty and students." According to a second teacher, "I would deal with the staff and demand a better commitment from them." A third teacher suggested that he would increase the frequency of the parent-teacher meetings. A fourth teacher

mentioned that she would organize forums where teachers, students and parents could interact and express their grievances in order to find solutions to the problems affecting students' study habits. The fifth teacher said, "I would try to reduce the number of students in each class, creating a better environment for learning and teaching."

The above data provides evidence of the strong role the school principal played to ensure high student graduation rates and low dropout rates. His work with students, parents and teachers suggest that he helped support a caring, contextual and secure environment for learning. His influence would affect each student's motivation to stay at school. The data from the interviews also seem to indicate that strong leadership can be effective in nurturing the commitment and passion of teachers to teach well and to be innovative.

Classroom Management

One teacher observed that managing the classroom was an art. The concept of discipline was very different among the Nagas. It was often very hard to maintain discipline from a western point of view. Students liked to interact with each other and were very playful. The discipline in students' homes was very different from that of the other parts of India. The children were often not attentive in class and their attention span was short. It was also difficult to maintain eye contact with students. According to a second teacher, students were always very naughty and ready for a fight. Students came to the high school from different primary schools and liked to outsmart each other. In that process, fights broke out among students which had a ripple effect in the classroom. According to a third teacher, once in a while a strong tension between two groups of students can be felt in the class. Failure to detect these tensions may create a difficult discipline scenario

within the classroom. When a situation became uncontrollable, students were sent to the principal. The principal dealt with such situations always with the cooperation of the students' parents and village leaders.

A fourth teacher reported that at the beginning of every academic year, students were made aware of their differences in regard to ethnicity, tribe and clan. Students were encouraged to work together and to bring out the best of themselves for their own betterment and welfare of the society. They were encouraged to respect each other's differences rather than ridicule them. Students came from different villages and had different ideas of life. All teachers agreed that having fewer students in the classroom would really help them, enabling each teacher to give more attention to individual students. Currently, there was an average of forty five students in each classroom. The ideal classroom size, according to teachers, was between thirty and thirty five students in each classroom, but no more. It was also very difficult for a teacher to go through the homework every day and do a good job. Teachers felt bad that they were not able to correct papers in detail or point out all the mistakes students made in their homework due to lack of time. Teachers also felt bad that they were not able to challenge the bright and smart students more.

One of the teachers, who was from a very different ethnic background, found it extremely difficult to maintain discipline in the classroom. The teacher often had to seek the intervention of the principal at the beginning of the academic year. But the teacher was able to win the confidence of the students by the end of the second semester and now the students liked the teacher.

The evidence indicates that students need to be more engaged in their own learning. A caring and creative classroom environment promoted such learning. Classroom discipline was a significant contributor for such learning. The evidence seems to suggest that teachers need to be aware of the internal dynamics of students from different clans or tribes. Early detection and a timely response can avert problems leading to students leaving the school. The teacher needs to consciously promote the uniqueness of each tribe/clan and the contribution of its members to create an environment that promotes teaching and learning.

Perceptions around Phenomenon of Dropout

The family was a major contributing factor for dropouts in this region, reported three teachers. If either one of the parents had some education, they in turn would nurture students who desired to learn and graduate from school. One teacher reported that “Naga students have a short attention span. Many of the families experience conflicts and some children are emotionally disturbed. Emotional disturbance coupled with a short attention span makes a good recipe for under performance and eventually dropout from school.” Two teachers said that sometimes other children invented their own reasons for dropping out of school. Insurgent groups also attracted high school students. Some students left school to join these insurgent groups. “Naga students tend to have less interest in study,” reported a second teacher. The subjects they studied had very little connection to their lives and often students did not know why they were studying. Lack of interest and the study of alien subject matter added to the tendency to dropout of school.

According to three teachers, the poor financial situation of the family was another major contributing factor to dropout. The parents found it difficult to send their children

to school and meet all their needs. One teacher stated that some students found it hard to fulfill the expectations placed on them by the school. Instead of taking this as a challenge, they chose to drop out and live a simple life style in their rural village. In many cases neither parent had ever been to school and therefore did not encourage or direct their children to have a proper education. Nevertheless, according to the teachers, the school had done very well over the past years in retaining and graduating about 90% of its students. The personal attention given to students had helped to retain them at school. The principal and teachers worked together; in particular, they worked with underperforming students to help them graduate from school.

The above mentioned reasons account for the small percentage of dropout among students of this school. The evidence indicates that the reasons for dropout are mostly external. The individualized attention and other support systems in place in the classroom have enhanced retention at this school.

Teachers' Perception of School Culture

The school was located among the Angami sub-tribe. The predominant values of the tribe, according to three teachers, were courage, honesty and hard work. The same three teachers reported that these values were reflected at school manifested through the football team and in the school choir. All the teachers reported that they had organized many cultural programs throughout the academic year at the school to help develop and appreciate cultural talents of the children. According to the teachers these cultural programs raised the spirit of the school.

According to one teacher, students who graduated often returned for a short time to teach at the school. There was a sense of pride among all sectors of the school. The

school authority collaborated with the state educational authorities to improve the quality of education at school. Many of the children participated in activities conducted at the state level. These participations helped students learn better and enabled them to deepen their love for and commitment to the institution. The school was very sensitive to the issues of ecology. Students from the early years were made aware of the need to protect nature. Activities were conducted at school to promote respect for nature.

According to all the five teachers, the school diary served as a medium of communication between parents and teachers. Every student had a school diary in which the teacher wrote information that the parents needed to know. One teacher explained that parents were to request permission from their child's teacher for their child to be absent at school. The parents needed to inform the teachers through the medium of school diary the reason for their child's absence. Likewise, teachers informed parents about the progress that their child was making at school. According to a fourth teacher, "what we expect from parents is mostly in the area of discipline. We want parents to control the aggressive behavior of their children." All the teachers reported that they encouraged parents to come and witness the performance of their children in public events. Three teachers reported that the school enjoyed the full patronage of the local village council.

All teachers reported that their students came from different tribes or clans. According to one teacher, this mixture created opportunities to exchange ideas, festivities, and cultural attire among the students. Two teachers noted the friction that existed between these groups. According to one teacher, teachers had to walk a fine line to avoid alienating any particular group. The school had to be very sensitive to the cultural and religious diversities that existed at school. All teachers seem to agree that

their students were gifted with artistic talents and that the principal created opportunities inside and outside of the school to display their artistic creations.

Observation Findings

The following chart summarizes and condenses the findings from the observation done at school number three. For the purpose of this study, a total of five classrooms, for a period of a class hour, was observed. The researcher observed three classrooms and visited another four classrooms while another observer observed two classrooms using the same protocol. The second observer (same as in school number two) was trained earlier to use the same protocol used in the other two schools. The observations were done in Math I, Math II, English I, English II, and Science classrooms. The observations were done during the class period. During the observation, a list of things pertaining to effective classroom teaching were checked off and tallied to fill in the following summary chart.

One English teacher and two math teachers mapped out on the board the lesson plan of the day while the English teacher II and the science teacher made the transition from the previous lesson to a new lesson by giving the students a summary of the previous day's lesson. Except for math teacher I, all others teachers reviewed the key concepts and points of the previous day's lesson, helping students to stay focused in the class. The science teacher asked the students in the class to spell out what they learned from the previous day's lesson. Only two teachers explained in clear terms what the students would be learning on that particular day. English I, science and math I teachers continually asked questions to students to know if the students were following the class. The math teacher took the trouble to work out the problem on the board thrice, explaining

each step separately. Three teachers summarized the lesson at the end of the class hour while two teachers just stopped the class abruptly.

Table # 4.3 Summary of classroom observation

Sl.No.		T – 1 (E-I)	T – 2 (E-II)	T – 3 (S)	T – 4 (M -I)	T – 5 (M-II)
01.	Did the teacher MAP OUT the lesson on the board?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
02.	Did the teachers take measures to ensure successful TRANSITION.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
03.	Did the teacher REVIEW the major concepts from the previous lesson and ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE?	Yes	yes	yes	No	Yes
04.	Did the teacher explain the PURPOSE of today's lesson clearly and accurately?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
05.	Did the teacher ask PROCESSING QUESTIONS throughout today's lesson to CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
06.	Did the teacher take five minutes at the end of class to SUMMARIZE today's learning?	Yes	yes	No	No	Yes
07.	Did the teacher ask the students to REFLECT on what they learned?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
08.	Did the teacher assign work in a VERBAL or WRITTEN form?	Both	Written	Both	Written	Verbal
09.	Did the teacher model all the strategies, behaviors, etc?	No	No	No	Yes	No
10.	Did the teacher consciously support the students by focusing on their POSITIVE qualities and PRAISING their efforts?	No	No	Not sure	No	Yes
11.	Did the teacher handle PROBLEMS quickly and discreetly, treating students with RESPECT and FAIRNESS?	Not sure	Yes	No	Yes	Not sure
12.	Did the teacher create a safe, supportive ENVIRONMENT in which students could grow and learn?	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure
13.	Did the teacher emphasize the "SPECIALNESS" of each individual student and the group as a whole?	No	Not sure	yes	Not sure	No

(E-1 = English one, E- II = English two, S = Science, M-I = Mathematics one, M-I = Mathematics two)

Only two teachers really asked any kind of question that would help the students to reflect further. All the teachers gave instruction for homework for the following day. Except for one teacher, who made the class stand up and down three times during the class period, the other teachers did not follow any particular strategies to manage the students' behavior. The students were quite cooperative and attentive except in science and math II. Except for one teacher, the teachers did not positively reinforce the uniqueness of their qualities. In the science class, the teacher was not able to really control the class. The teacher on that day was explaining a particular experiment on the board. The school did not have any science lab. The science teacher had a chart on the board demonstrating that particular chemical experiment and some of the students were talking to each other making fun of something. The teacher in a raised voice asked the students to keep quiet. None of the teachers really spoke highly of any of the students. Only one teacher made a remark about a student who answered well in the class that day.

The collected data provided for the researcher an insight as to what was happening in all these classrooms. The evidence seemed to indicate that most of the teachers really created an environment of learning and engagement for students. Although the teachers in this school were very friendly, most of them had very little experience in teaching. The researcher observed a certain amount of commitment and passion. The teachers really wanted the students to graduate. The researcher was compelled to conclude that these teachers needed to undergo training in pedagogy to create a better environment for learning and teaching.

The observation protocol could be described as the sum of some of the best classroom practices possible. It is possible that even in the best of circumstances, one

may never find all the aspects of this protocol in single classroom observation. The classroom observation data seemed to indicate one of the possible reasons for the 10 - 12% dropout rates. Nevertheless, this dropout rate is much lower than in the large majority of other schools in that area.

Summary of the Findings of School Number Three

The school tried to create an atmosphere of social connectedness and community, based on the values of the indigenous people of that area. The remoteness of the school, limited resources, the presence of multiple ethnic groups, fewer opportunities for work, and less development in the region had a direct impact on teaching and learning. In the last three years the school has been able to retain and graduate about 90% of its students in comparison to the 40% average rate in fully state owned schools (Result Gazette, 2008).

The researcher observed that connectedness was always balanced by the good will and sense of community that existed among students, teachers, the leadership, parents, and local elders. The principal was vigilant and proactive to keep equilibrium in place, particularly when dealing with the issues of different clans or tribes. Any kind of perceived imbalance in dealing with these conflicts at school would end in the loss of connectedness with the community. The researcher observed that connectedness motivated students to focus on their studies in view of a better economic future. Students (in their own words) spoke of a cordial relationship that existed among them, their teachers, and the leadership (i.e. principal). Likewise, the teachers informed the researcher of the same relationship that existed among students, parents and the

leadership. The researcher found this same connectedness in all the classrooms during the observation.

The teachers knew that their dedication, professionalism and good will would ultimately blunt the sting of ignorance in the least animated student. For this reason, teachers worked together and often attempted to cultivate and nurture a healthy relationship with all the students, in an effort to make the academic and social goals of the school work. These goals included an appreciation of nature and the environment. To this end, the researcher noted that the school attempted to create learning opportunities for both students and teachers alike in an effort to promote a better knowledge of the ecological, economic, and social environment in which they all lived. The connectedness the school cultivated with different elements in society – teachers with local elders, parents, civil officials – had also enabled students of various backgrounds to remain at school in spite of the challenges they faced in their homes and villages. The principal also reported about his struggle in creating more opportunities for students and teachers due to the current insurgency problem that existed in the state.

A contextualized pedagogy that took into account the background and learning styles of a wide variety of students ultimately helped the students to focus on their learning and the various academic disciplines. Pedagogical practices that promoted academic achievement in concert with indigenous values sustained the interest of students and moved them to actively involve themselves in the life of the school. Providing background material for the particular lessons and pictorial books helped students to get a better grasp of the subject taught. The pedagogy used by teachers was more geared towards memorization of the subject matter, leading to the attainment of the

required grade in state level examinations to graduate from high school. The connectedness of the subject matter with the indigenous symbols enhanced the possibility of students retaining the subject matter that was taught to them.

The findings tend to support the hypothesis that a positive classroom environment can have a significant effect on boys and girls in choosing to remain at school. The style of instruction coupled with the positive attitude of teachers all helped to enhance -- in students -- academic progress and self-development. This has led to a better rate of retention. Even though the researcher did not find in all observed classes a positive and supportive environment conducive to learning, the researcher did find the elements of care and nurturing. It is also significant to note that only five out of eighteen teachers (28%) at this school were professionally trained to teach. According to the educational statistics (2007), 88% of the government school teachers and 95% of the privately run school teachers are not professionally trained in the state of Nagaland. Yet the school seems to retain and graduate almost 90% of its students. This is possibly due to student-teacher interaction, contextualized pedagogy, the commitment of teachers, motivation of students, and parental involvement that is coupled with the vision of the principal.

The leadership, according to the findings, provided the necessary vision and direction to make the objectives and goals of the school obtainable. The visible presence of the principal and his affirming interaction also helped maintain the motivation of the community, on all levels of operation. The sense of community has also motivated students to stay at school. All this has led to a better graduation rate. The principal according to teachers, provided direction, guidance, and training to teachers to create a safe and engaging learning environment at this school.

In this chapter the findings from individual schools have been provided and chapter five will provide a cross case analysis of the research and summarize the findings across all three schools. There will also be a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature discussed in chapter two and in relation to the current Indian context. Chapter five will also suggest the limitations of the study and present the political implications of putting the findings into practice in light of the drop-out rates in schools in India. The study will also make suggestions on how to initiate preparation programs for teachers and administrators who wish to put together and implement various elements of this study in their respective schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The goal of this study was to chronicle and examine the effective teaching methods of educators working in schools with high retention and graduation rates (100% in most cases). This chapter will present a cross-case analysis of findings across three schools. Then it will discuss the findings in light of the research literature reviewed in chapter two. The chapter will conclude with potential inferences that can be drawn for policy and practice in schools that serve indigenous communities in rural India. These same conclusions can also be used for educational preparation, professional development, and future research in such schools.

Cross-Case Analysis

Having reported the findings for each school as a separate case in chapter four, we now turn to the cross-case analysis of similarities and differences among the schools in order to discern more clearly, perhaps, those characteristics that suggest reasons why these schools have been successful in retaining and graduating their students. First, we will look at the findings based on student interviews from these three schools. Then we will look at the findings based on teacher interviews from these three schools. Then we will consider the classroom observation from the three schools. The evidence drawn from an analysis of these three sources will provide the grounding for our conclusions.

Students' Responses and Perceptions to teaching practices among cases

The findings in chapter four suggest that there were more similarities than differences in student responses of the focus group interviews. While there were differences across the

schools with regard to the ethnicity, teacher qualification, parental involvement, infrastructure, and economic status of the families, there were similarities among student responses in regard to teacher caring and respect, teaching methods, leadership, and the role of principal.

According to the students in school number one, teachers had mastery over the subject matter that was being taught. Teachers used a form of “story narration” for instruction. This method helped students to actively participate in the classroom. Teachers took extreme care to explain difficult words, concepts, and phrases to students. And finally, teachers used different instructional strategies to create and maintain the interest of the students in their particular subjects.

The pedagogical competencies students found in teachers were as follows: a) Skillful communication, b) Positive approach to students, c) Respect for students, d) Honesty and sincerity, e) Love for students, f) No ill feelings towards students, g) Understanding, h) Talent for teaching, i) Friendly and family- oriented attitude, and j) A patient and kind disposition.

According to students in school number two, teachers brought to class a wide range of personal experiences. Teachers made the instruction simple to enable students to understand the subject that was being taught. Teachers created an environment of learning within the classroom by connecting students to the world around them.

The competencies students found in a teacher revolved around the following: a) Respect for others, b) An awareness that the teacher was a role model, c) A good nature, d) A gentle voice, and e) A supportive attitude toward the students.

According to students in school number three, teachers had an in-depth knowledge of the subject that was being taught. Teachers made instruction inspiring and interesting. Most of the teachers had a way of making the subject or lesson likable to the students. Teachers made references to their local environment and used symbols and signs drawn from their indigenous culture. Teachers had wonderful skills to manage classrooms, particularly when there was tribal tension among groups of students within the classroom. Teachers also brought to the class local and international issues that affected the region.

The competencies students found in their teacher were: a) Emotional clarity in expression, b) Frankness and openness, c) Personableness and genuineness, and d) Efficient communication skills.

Most of the students in the group were unanimous in portraying the traits that they did not like to see in a teacher: 1) They did not want to see a teacher who was not willing to appreciate students and who always found reasons to criticize the students, particularly in regard to homework; 2) The students preferred not to deal with a teacher who had no passion for teaching; 3) Students didn't want teachers who had no skills for interacting with the underachieving student population; 4) The students wanted to see a teacher who could understand and love them; and 5) Students wanted their teachers to be impartial and fair in grading.

Although there was no intention to generalize the data collected from student interview groups in individual case-studies, cross-case analysis revealed the emergence of meta-level themes such as mastery of the subject, creative instructional strategy, use of local cultural images, and effective classroom management. A cross-case analysis

articulated four distinctive areas of competencies, specifically: communication skills, respect and care, positive attitude towards all, and finally, authenticity.

Students' Responses and Perceptions to school leadership

In school number one, students liked to see in their principal a person who was willing to understand and thus reduce the pressure to perform. Students wanted their principal to be less annoying, but hold students accountable for their learning. Students liked their principal to allot more days to summer holidays. They wanted their principal to increase the time for fun activities during the school hours.

In school number two, students did not have anything in particular to say except to communicate an appreciation for their principal. According to students in school number three, they wanted to see more cooperation and a better relationship between principal and teachers. They also wanted that principal to allot more financial resources towards the labs.

The students' perception of leadership seemed to suggest that students were looking for a school environment of learning that was engaging, practical, enjoyable, and relaxed. They wanted an environment that reduced pressure on students and created opportunities to learn and connect with people.

Even though a stern, demanding, and authoritarian attitude was a common criticism of the principal, the students loved their principal and were very appreciative of what the principal did for them. Some of the concerns of the students in regard to summer holidays and allotment of resources were not necessarily within the power of the principal. Most of the resource allocations and school calendar dates were the prerogatives of the school management board. The students loved their principal.

Students' Responses and Perceptions to dropout phenomenon

According to the students of school number one, the main reasons for the dropout rate among their peers were: a) Family problems, b) Parental indifference, c) Failure in a course, d) Pressure on student, e) Temporary jobs to raise money, and f) Number of siblings.

According to school number two, the students' perception focused on: a) Fear of the unknown, b) Family problems, c) Yielding to vices, d) Unbridled freedom, e) Early parenthood.

According to school number three, the following were the reasons for the dropout rate: a) Lack of Intelligence, b) Laziness, c) Cultural traits that did not give people a second chance, d) Lack of connectedness, e) Procrastination, f) Family problems, g) Addiction, and h) Method of instruction

These findings indicated that students perceived unchecked freedom and fear of the unknown as factors that contributed to some students dropping out of school. The students noted that indigenous children enjoyed lots of freedom in their villages. The students who dropped out were perceived as afraid to confront the realities and changes that were surfacing in themselves and in their communities. Students across these three schools perceived that some indigenous students dropped out of school in an attempt to remain in their traditional world. Findings also indicated that the students perceived the preponderance of reasons for students dropping out of the school were external to the school, rather than internal i.e., due to problems with the way classrooms or the schools themselves were run. Therefore one might argue that many of the external reasons were not present in the classroom experience of these students and that the students' positive

experiences of the three schools far outweighed the external influences according to these students and their parents.

Teacher Interviews

All three schools had an excellent reputation for graduating indigenous students of northeast India. All the teachers the researcher met with and interviewed were very friendly and passionate about teaching and learning. They loved their students. All the teachers reported that they did what was possible within their limits to ensure a better future for their children. Teachers were found to be committed and were willing to sacrifice their personal time and resources for the welfare of students. Teachers appeared to work together as a team to create an environment of teaching and learning. They reported that underperforming students were given support and motivation to succeed. These teachers were also actively involved in their communities and the village life there. In general, the teachers were agents of change ushering in a different understanding of the world to the people in the locality. Teachers were respected by students, parents, and their communities.

Teachers' Responses and Perceptions to teaching practices

All teachers interviewed said that they used images and local languages to explain the text that was used at school. The teachers reported that they brought to class and discussed issues that had or were having an effect on the region, particularly the environment. Teachers from all three schools were aware of global warming and its effects on their lives. For many teachers, deforestation and mining were major issues in their region. Most of the teachers were aware of these issues and promoted that

awareness among students and parents alike, through discussions and other forms of communication.

Most teachers reported that discussions in small groups were organized to share a student's thoughts and perceptions about how he or she would apply learning to life. According to the teachers interviewed, these discussion forums brought the best out of students. Even the students who were very shy about answering questions in a large classroom participated in these discussions. They said that these discussions generated interaction, thinking, and reflection. Teachers regretted that they could not have more of these forums; but due to the constraints of time, they could not.

The teachers in all three schools said that they promoted local cultures and cultural forms of expression. The schools organized functions at regular intervals to ensure opportunities for students to exhibit and share their cultural traits, costumes, and attire. These became learning moments to promote understanding and respect for different cultures and traditions. The schools also celebrated different religious festivities to expose students to different faith traditions. All three schools had short prayer services at the beginning and at the end of the school day. These prayers were found in the student handbook. The researcher observed that even though the prayers had Christian roots, they were adapted to suit persons of any religious faith.

Teachers in all three schools communicated that students were given individual attention. The teachers did their best to reach out to each individual student to meet his or her needs. They spoke of trying to customize learning, particularly for the benefit of the underperforming students in order to facilitate their graduation. Reaching out to each individual student was a challenge for teachers as there were anywhere between 45 – 70

students in the average classroom. Oftentimes, teachers had to make numerous personal sacrifices to be available for students. Sometimes balancing personal and family life created tensions for teachers, which had to be dealt with. All teachers agreed that the school leadership was supportive and understanding. Teachers on a regular basis had to carry home student workbooks in order to return them to the students a day or two later.

Teachers in all three schools reported that their principal got involved and dealt with difficult discipline issues. Usually, the teacher reported to the principal any serious problem created by a student. The principal then informed the student's parents about the issue. Often the parents were requested to meet with the principal to solve the issue and help the student overcome his or her behavioral problems. The attendees of these meetings were normally the parents, the class teacher, and the student. Teachers believed that the individual attention paid to students helped them to amend their behavior and focus on their studies, and this in turn helped many students to graduate from school. Indeed, parental involvement coupled with the supervision of the principal helped the student adjust to his or her role in a very short time. The school also offered students other supportive services such as counseling.

The teachers reported that about 50% - 70% of them were not trained to teach at high school as per the requirement of the State Board of Education. The low salary and remoteness of location did not help to attract qualified teachers. However, even though teachers lacked training in pedagogy, they seemed to make up for it by their sheer commitment to the goals of the schools. In addition, all three schools had programs to help teachers learn the process of teaching and learning. Regarding this, however, the teachers did express a desire to have more opportunities for professional development.

Teachers in all three schools remarked that their particular school exhibited a consistent commitment to reach out to the underprivileged of society. For this reason, students from low economic backgrounds received the necessary assistance in terms of financial aid and academic support to graduate.

It is evident that teachers who were interviewed in all three schools seemed to report similar patterns and practices such as the use of local languages during classroom instruction, group discussion on topics that were relevant to the region, the promotion of local cultures and cultural forms of expression in and outside the classroom, sincere effort to provide individualized attention, particularly for the underperforming students and the active involvement of parents and the principal in discipline issues. All three schools exhibited and promoted a commitment to education, particularly for the underprivileged. The above practices used by teachers seemed to help students stay at school and graduate.

Examples of Distinctive Pedagogical Practices

In school number one, legible handwriting was made a priority. The teachers provided students with handbooks and exercises to promote legibility. The best examples of handwriting were awarded and acknowledged by the teachers. In case number two, priority was placed on speaking English during school hours, not their local language. In case number three, priority was placed on spelling and the correct pronunciation of words.

School number one and two had hands-on projects for students, to be undertaken during the school year. These projects helped students to deepen their knowledge of the subject matter taught in class. The projects also generated discussions about broader life issues that they were facing.

School number one had field trips organized to visit various parts of the country. Students took advantage of these trips. Some of these trips were organized to important historic places in Delhi and Calcutta. These trips were expensive and not all students could take advantage of them. Parental support was crucial in making these trips a learning experience for the students who could go. The teachers had to sacrifice their personal time and resources to make these field trips a success. The school also organized short trips to nearby historic sites so that all students could take advantage of some kind of trip.

School number one had also organized service trips to nearby shelters and other places that provided social services. The school wanted to ensure that some of their students, who had the privilege of a quality education, would be exposed to extreme poverty, hoping in time that these students would one day repay society by serving the underprivileged.

In schools numbers one and two, teachers provided additional help to students after school hours. By contrast, in school number three, the teachers during school time spent their lunch hour assisting students. Students who needed extra help could approach teachers and make the necessary appointments to meet with them.

Many of the teachers assisted students in response to their needs. Often these children had very little foundation to meet the challenges and tasks set before them. Nevertheless, the teachers went out of their way to prepare these students to meet these challenges and the greatest challenge of all-- their state level board exams. Schools number two and three had boarding houses attached to their school. These boarding houses mainly served children who were from far away villages.

Teachers in school number one had a better exposure to schools in other parts of the country. These broader experiences enabled teachers to improve their pedagogy and other educational practices. Their exposure to the different cultures of India also instilled in them a sense of patriotism. Not surprisingly, these teachers played a vital role in promoting patriotism and communal harmony at school. The photos of the great leaders of India, for example, with short character descriptions, were placed at a prominent place at school.

Parental Involvement

Students in school number one were second or third generation students to go to school, while students in schools number two and three were first generation. The parents of students in case number one were supportive; that was not true, however, in cases two and three. Parents in the city (school number one) spent their precious resources on the education of their children. Parents in school number one were also actively engaged in the education of their children at home. For example parents provided rides back and forth from school at their own expense. One of the parents even escorted their children to school everyday.

The parents of the students in school number one were also financially stable and had access to better food, books, and clothing. These parents were aware of the need to provide their children with quality education. They were also ready to make sacrifices to ensure quality education for them. On the other hand, many of the children in cases two and three had very little access to food, books and clothing. Often parents in these categories were from interior villages and discouraged their children from going to school. These parents had very little education and were not aware of the need or

necessity to have a quality education for their children. Many of these families in the villages lived off their common land. That was all they had. Their survival depended on the monsoon season. Their lives were often based on a gamble with nature. For example, if there was too much rain, then their crops and cattle were affected. Families might even have very little to live on, if it was a bad season. However, even in the midst of so much uncertainty, children who were admitted to these schools from such poorer backgrounds were determined to graduate against all odds with the support and assistance of their schools.

Most of the children from school numbers two and three had little or no support from their parents. They had to work in the field before and after school to provide for the families. Most of these students also had to walk from thirty minutes to an hour to reach the school. The students from far off villages, however, had accommodations at boarding houses managed by the school. A boarding house could accommodate about one hundred and fifty students (boys and girls). These boarding houses were subsidized by the school and supported by the local government, thus providing an opportunity for underprivileged students from distant areas to attend school.

Teachers' Perceptions about Leadership

All teachers in each school who were interviewed expressed satisfaction with regard to school leadership. The teachers reported that the school leadership had a vision and was committed to retaining and graduating all students. They perceived that the principal was very personable and rendered support, guidance, supervision and motivation. The teacher and students generally agreed that the principals were easily available and were models

of hard work and commitment. Most of the teachers felt that their principal took them into confidence and allowed them to be creative in their respective areas of teaching.

In all three schools, the principal expected more from students and teachers. The principal wanted academic excellence, a value-based education, and cultural integration. The principals assisted teachers who wanted to be creative in their instruction and teaching.

In school number one, the principal met with individual teachers at regular intervals to assess current contracts and to plan ahead. Teachers reported that the principal often inquired about their individual welfare besides promoting professional conversation among them. According to the teachers, these conferences were open and generated lots of ideas for improvement at school. It also helped the teachers to make more connections with the principal in a cordial atmosphere.

In schools number two and three, the principals appeared to be friendly, cordial, compassionate, and impartial. The teachers reported that they gained a sense of satisfaction in dealing with the principal. The interaction with the principal, according to teachers, helped teachers to be more authentic and committed. Often the principal encouraged and nurtured teachers to be more committed to the education of the poor and downtrodden.

Teachers in all three schools said that the principals were very inclusive and worked towards national integration and patriotism. The principal also created an atmosphere at school that encouraged the respect of individual cultures and traditions. The principal, in cooperation with the parents, also directly handled any conflict and

discipline issues at school. This left the teachers with more time to attend to the academic aspects of the classroom.

All the teachers in the three schools reported the need to have better infrastructures and facilities for the students. All three schools had few resources to utilize modern technology for instruction. Some teachers reported that the administration was trying to install up-to-date facilities, but these required extra money. Teachers would have liked better salaries and other benefits, too.

Teachers' Responses and Perceptions of School Culture

Love for an institution was continually cultivated through different activities and programs in all three schools. The programs held at these schools fused popular culture with traditional culture. There was also a respect for family and a sense of its importance reflected in all three schools.

In school number one, the levels of stress were very high. The teachers and students wanted to be the best academically and this caused the stress. In school number two, sports were promoted at the school. Their school team a few years ago played in the national championship. The school community was really proud of its team.

Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Management

Teachers in all three schools worked with classes of anywhere between 45 -70 students. Managing the classroom was a challenge. While the teachers took great care to know each student individually, special attention was paid to students who were academically weak.

The teachers felt the pressure to complete the syllabus proposed by their respective State Education Boards. Due to this pressure, teachers could not spend more

time with each student, helping him or her to study better. Memorization was a key to scoring high marks on the State Level Examination. Teachers encouraged students in all three cases to memorize what was taught at school in order to score successfully at the exam.

Findings from Classroom Observation

In all three cases, the researcher observed a caring interaction between the principal, teachers, and students. The principal, for example, prior to the daily beginning of the classes was outside the office, mingling with students, parents, and teachers. The principals in their respective schools were also found in the hallways, often observing the teaching and promoting discipline. Teachers came to school carrying a large number of student notebooks that they had taken home to correct. The classroom observation was limited to a one class period.

In school number one, the teachers used different strategies to conduct instruction on a given day. Three of the teachers were positive and appreciated the students in their effort to learn the given subject matter. Two teachers handled discipline in the class with respect while one of the teachers forcefully reinforced her authority by raising her voice and ordering them to be quiet. Two teachers dwelt on the uniqueness of individual students and reminded them of the privilege of being in a good school. Three of the five teachers clearly mapped out their lesson plans of the day on the blackboard, while the other two teachers just mentioned in words what they would be doing on that day. Three teachers summarized the main points of the class in very clear terms while the mathematics teacher rather abruptly ended the instruction at the school bell. Given the limitation of the class sizes, the classroom environment reflected care and concern. The

students were engaged and were quite attentive to what the teachers were teaching. The other two teachers were not explicit in positive reinforcement.

In school number two, the lesson plan was mapped out on the board by four teachers to help students understand what they were expected to learn on that day. Prior to the class, the mathematics teacher had a detailed lesson plan on the board. Three teachers reviewed major concepts from the previous day's instruction. These teachers had interaction with the students in the form of questions and answers. Some of the teachers used the local language to field questions. In some cases students answered in English and others in the local language. Most of the teachers summarized the learning of the day in a few words. The teachers in strong terms reminded students about the homework.

In school number three, three teachers had the lesson plans written down on the board. Four of the teachers reviewed what was taught earlier in the week and connected that content to what was taught on that particular day. All the teachers gave instruction for homework the following day. Three teachers summarized what was taught on that day. The observer was not certain if the teachers really created an environment of support and care.

Given the limitation of the class sizes, the classroom environment was caring in all three schools. The students were engaged and quite attentive to what the teachers were teaching. Students appeared to be very cooperative and seemed hungry for more learning. The teaching method seemed to be centered on memorization in order to pass the state level examination. Nevertheless, most of the teachers were making efforts to connect the subject matter with the living environment of the students. These classroom observations

were limited to one class period and do not necessarily reflect what the teachers do every day in their class.

Researchers' Field Notes

The researcher noticed the friendly and cordial relationship that existed at the school between teachers and students, parents and school authorities, and among all the teachers. The researcher had an opportunity to be at the staffroom many times during the same week. There were many students in the staff room who came to meet with individual teachers. The teachers appeared to be very committed to the profession and had an appreciation for the principal. All teachers appeared to want their students to succeed and bring a good name to the school

The researcher would have liked to see fewer students, better facilities, and more space for movement in the classroom. The researcher also would have liked to see more use of technology for instruction particularly in the city school. The researcher also noticed that there was lots of pressure on students to memorize and prepare themselves to attain distinction in the state level examination. The teaching was geared to make it possible for these students to get admission into prestigious institutions of higher education. The students appeared to get very little time to play and enjoy their childhood.

Summary of the Evidence

This cross-case study was undertaken to develop a better understanding of the effective teaching practices put into action in these schools among the indigenous people of Northeast India. It was the researchers' hypothesis that these effective teaching practices enabled students to stay in school and graduate on time. The cross-case analysis was framed by two research question that guided this study: What were the teaching practices

that characterized three high schools with successful records (upwards of 100%) of graduating indigenous Northeast India tribal students? (2) How were these successful schools affected by the school leadership? It was important to consider the similarities, differences, and the contexts in which the case studies were conducted. The case studies were conducted in two different states of Northeast India. One case study was conducted in a city that is known as the education capital of the northeast. The second study was conducted in a village far away from the city, with minimal infrastructure. The third case study was conducted in a town along the interstate highway. Cases number two and three had boarding houses attached to the schools

The researcher analyzed the content and qualitative data drawn from a cross-case study of the three schools to identify the main characteristics that have enabled good teachers and a successful school to graduate their students. The main qualities of a good teacher that emerged from the study were as follows: the teacher had the understanding and implementation of a contextualized pedagogy, the teacher had reasonable knowledge and was passionate about the subject matter, had respect for and the ability to connect with students, held high expectations for what students could achieve, had the skills to communicate in local languages, exhibited motivational leadership, and were committed to helping students create a lasting learning experience.

The intent of this study was to identify and describe the major school-related factors that explain why students at the three high schools decide to stay at these schools until graduation. The findings provide evidence that the principal, the teachers and their pedagogical practices directly and indirectly have a significant effect on students' decisions to stay at school and graduate.

Discussion of the Findings on Research Question One

The research study was conducted with intent to answer the overarching question of why students stay and graduate in these schools while students of other schools drop out. The first research question was framed in the following way: What are the teaching practices that characterize three high schools with successful records (upwards of 100%) of graduating indigenous Northeast India tribal students? The schools chosen lacked teachers who had been trained as per the stipulation of the Board of Education. While most of the teachers had graduate degrees in their respective academic fields, only a few had undergone the teachers' (B.Ed) training program which qualified them to teach at high school. The schools did not have adequate or sufficient classrooms for students. The classrooms were crowded and often not well lit. All three schools were in the process of implementing computer and other audio visual facilities to support teaching and learning. The researcher found different elements of "best teaching practices" present at all three schools. These characteristics reflected various effective teaching practices that are represented in the contemporary literature. (Villa, Thousand, Nevin & Liston, 2005; Rajput & Walia, 2001; Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005).

What became apparent through the cross- case analysis is an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the teachers in all three schools insisted on learning through memorization of the content of the text book. Success on the government examinations requires the memorization of large amounts of information. On the other hand, even while insisting on memory work, teachers used many strategies to encourage a deeper level of understanding and a spirit of inquiry.

In all three schools, teachers attempted to create a positive classroom environment for their students to think clearly, critically, and creatively (Elmore, 1995) to solve problems (Danielson & McGreal, 2000) within the context of a culture (Cajete, 1999) thus enabling them to build positive relationships with the immediate and extended world (Starratt, 2003; Cummins, 1986). This can be categorized as contextualized pedagogy.

Contextualized Pedagogy

Evidence of contextualized pedagogy coupled with the inclusion of indigenous symbols, literature, and ethos probably facilitated positive learning in these schools, as the research of Thomas (2002) and Olson & Brunner (1996) suggests. Evidence that teachers used a variety of learning activities and contextualized instructional strategies probably enabled students to construct and retain knowledge. Teachers animated students to learn by engaging them in authentic teaching and writing tasks within the diverse cultural context of Northeast India. According to earlier research, instructional responsiveness to the individual learning needs and aptitudes of students within a cultural context enhanced retention (Hyland, 2007). Embedding the nuances of culture in their instruction probably maintained their pupils' desire to learn and understand (Vygotsky, 1978, Daniels, 2002). Evidence of this contextualized instruction would support retention rate in these schools.

Learning is a process that nurtures the capacity of a student to think clearly, critically and creatively (Elmore, 1995). In order to achieve this objective, even while teaching for memorization, teachers helped students make connections across contexts and experiences in order to see the similarities and differences between the material they were studying and their prior knowledge. Teachers also brought to the classroom stories and experiences drawn from different tribal histories to help students see their reality in a

new light. In the process of learning, particularly through class projects, students discovered why things are as they are (Nixon, et al., 1999). The love for learning instilled through the efforts of these teachers has enabled students to stay at school, despite the challenges they faced at home (Sobel, 1999).

Contextual pedagogy created a different professional identity for the teachers. Teachers moved from being transmitters of knowledge to promoters of learning. Likewise, teachers developed “split” identities, one within the classroom, the other outside it. In the classroom, teachers strictly engaged their students in a particular process of learning while outside they tended to serve as a second parent, prompting a sustainable interest in education among students (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005). Teachers also served as agents of social change in the indigenous communities (Cajete, 1999). These teachers had to learn how to learn anew and promote a desire for learning among their students. They needed this “knowing how” in their teaching routines. In this regard, the researcher observed teachers engendering an interest in what they taught by making their subject relational, integrally and personally connected to their own lives.

The findings suggest that when teachers provided in-class time for students to read and discuss texts with peers, students were more engaged and able to interact with the text on more meaningful levels, especially in school number one (Lawrence et al., 2009). The findings also indicated that when teachers used a wide variety of instructional strategies to teach reading, students engaged in a wide array of literacy practices. That is, students interacted with different types of texts, engaged in critical discussions about authentic literature, and used reading comprehension strategies that helped them feel empowered as readers and self- directed learners. Group discussions and field visits also

enabled students to deepen their societal and moral values (Kohlberg, 1975, Danielson & McGreal, 2000)

Teachers also used commonly available instructional materials, especially the blackboard, to impart learning. Use of these materials helped students to develop various capacities to understand and apply knowledge to their life situations (Branford et al., 1999; Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005). Likewise, use of indigenous images increased student engagement which led to greater retention and graduation (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke & Hall, 2003).

The teachers also used a variety of learning activities and instructional strategies. They adjusted their instruction when necessary and engaged their students in authentic exercises of reading and writing. Teachers in school number three, for example, used the blackboard to maintain a daily class log and to provide updates and reminders to students. In this way, teachers made reading and writing practices more accessible, understandable, and meaningful to their students.

In schools number one and two, teachers organized field trips, group discussions, and students' projects to create a hands-on experience of learning. In case number three, teachers made available pictorial books to strike the imagination of their students. In all three cases, teachers used indigenous images, cultural traits, indigenous literature and local socio-economic political issues in the classroom to engage students and hold their interest.

Mastery and Thoroughness of the Subject

Teachers used a form of "story narration" for instruction. This method helped students to actively participate in the classroom. The observation data indicated that the teachers

demonstrated reasonable competence in all the academic subjects they taught. The teachers in all three cases pointed out to the researcher the children's ability to assimilate new information quickly and solve problems creatively. The teachers realized that they had to facilitate the process of learning in students by awakening them to who they were and what they were called to do (Kane, 1999). This process could not become a reality without having a mastery over the subject matter that the teacher was teaching, since learning needed to be dynamic, transformative, enjoyable and ongoing.

A good number of teachers understood that it was important to have a high degree of mastery of the course content that they taught as they were the constructors of knowledge and builders of a learning community through problem solving, enquiry and research (Starratt & Sergiovanni, 2006; Zemelman; Daniels & Hyde, 2005). They also understood the necessity of communicating effectively the subject matter within the context of a particular culture. According to Sobel (1999), any learning without love will not stick. However, if love comes first, knowledge will follow. In all three schools, the teachers loved their profession and were passionate in talking about their subjects even though it was sometimes a struggle for them to infuse life into a seemingly dry curriculum. Nevertheless, they hoped to cultivate in their students the same love they felt for the discipline (Connor & Lagares, 2007).

Most of the teachers appeared to be competent and mature, with a mastery of the subject matter they taught. They also developed skills to teach their subject to students in an engaging manner always within the context of the indigenous culture of their students. Students reported that they loved their teacher, which ultimately helped them in their desire to learn even mathematics. Findings suggested that it was necessary for teachers to

possess mastery of the subject matter, as ignorance and lack of preparedness led to student loss of respect for the teacher.

Teachers tried to create in students a liking for the subjects that were being taught. Teachers were also able to bring world issues to the classroom and relate them to the subject with ease. The education imparted in these schools was geared to help students develop and mature as persons, ... as thoughtful citizens, competent parents, faithful friends, capable workers, generous neighbors and lifelong learners. Education was also adopted to develop aesthetic, ethical and spiritual sensitivity, particularly in relation to indigenous cultures (Noddings, 2006).

Knowledge for indigenous people is not really separated from the reality of day-to-day life (Orr, 1992; Harris 1990). The challenge of a teacher is to impart new knowledge to a student that will awaken a desire for more, without upsetting his or her notion of reality or age old belief. Awakening their minds is a first step towards intellectual growth.

Classroom Management

The teachers implemented many positive classroom management strategies that made their classes flow smoothly (Spitalli, 2004). This resulted in an effective use of instructional time. Routines were put in place in each classroom which involved quizzes about the previous day's lessons, a student reading aloud the current lesson, and the submission of home work. There was a high level of interaction among the students within the classes (Palumbo & Sancore, 2007). While similarities existed, each teacher used certain techniques or activities that made him or her stand out as different or unique

from the others. These activities involved the entire class, even though managing such a large classroom full of students created major challenges for the teachers.

The students who did not adhere to the rules of discipline were reported to the principal. All teachers maintained a positive classroom environment. Principals in all three cases reached out to parents of troubled children. The school also had a system to track children who had difficulty at home and at school. The teachers found the necessary means to implement different aspects of classroom management (Senturk, 2006), such as creating a physical environment conducive to teaching and learning, providing an instruction that was engaging and informative, and managing student behavior (Tileston, 2005).

Teacher- student Interaction

The teachers' attitudes of care, respect, and commitment (Shulman, 1987) enabled students to stay at school and discover for themselves what they needed to know (Nixon, et al. 1999). Caring and determined leadership in collaboration with teachers, staff and village elders created an environment for teaching and learning which was engaging (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003) and relevant. Teachers had high expectations for students and interacted with them on a personal as well as professional level. A feeling of care, love, competition, and compassion permeated the hallways of these three schools. Teachers appeared to be impartial, kind, and honest in their dealings with students. The students felt that their teachers cared. According to Chall (2000), the ultimate goal of education is the development of creativity in students and skills for problem solving. This can be achieved by a teacher- centered and student-centered orientation of instruction. The teachers in these schools seemed to shift from one

orientation to the other, depending upon the subject matter that they were teaching at a given moment.

Clear Expectation by the Teachers

Evaluation criteria and expectations for behavior were clearly communicated to students at the beginning of the academic year. All three schools had in their handbooks a section on expectations and rules of behavior from school. These expectations were very similar in all three schools. The teachers reported that they reminded students on a regular basis about these expectations during their classroom instruction. One expectation was that all students needed to graduate from high school. In order to achieve that, every student was challenged in the handbook to demonstrate effort, initiative, and respect for each other. The school also provided assistance to well - deserving students.

The underperforming and economically challenged students were identified early on and were provided with needed assistance (Zhang & Law, 2005; Hansen & Toso, 2007). The schools provided needed motivation for education while other state and federal agencies stepped in with the necessary resources (Ghailani & Khan, 2004). The teachers were actively involved in each school, serving on different committees and involving themselves in extra-curricular activities for students. Teachers in all three schools were student centered and built sustainable relationships leading to better graduation rates.

Communication Skills

Communication skills are the best tools for managing teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships. The teachers were effective communicators in the classroom.

Teachers spoke local languages and often dressed in indigenous attire, enabling them to

create connectedness (1990). The students from all three cases reported that all their teachers communicated their subjects with clarity and precision empowering students to learn (Cummins, 1986)

Content analysis within each case and cross-case analysis of qualitative data identified contextualized pedagogy, teacher – student interaction, clear expectations by the teachers, motivational leadership, differentiated instruction, mastery and thorough treatment of the subject, effective communication skills, and effective classroom management as the main characteristics of these highly successful schools that were studied in the northeast of India.

Parental involvement

Parental support was essential. Unless the parents sent their children to school nothing could be done. In all three cases (but especially in school number one), parents decided to send their children to school and make sacrifices which resulted in students staying at school. Teachers and students alike reported that their school was in communication and in good stead with parents. The school diary was used as medium of communication between teachers and parents (Epstein, 1987). The parents' engagement was essential for keeping students at school. In all three schools, parents had a role in the major decision making policies of the school that affected their children (Osher & Bailey, 2003; Zhang & Law, 2005)

Responses and Perceptions to Research Question two: How were these successful schools affected by the school leadership?

Principals from all three schools strategically (Cladwell, 1992) maintained a visible presence, conducted periodic classroom walkthroughs, and up- to- date

observations (Starratt & Sergiovanni, 2005). All three principals supported, nurtured and recognized students, staff, and teachers on a regular basis. All teachers and students agreed that the principal provided motivation and determination in creating an environment that supported learning and teaching (Capra, 1997; Sieber 2007). Both Capra and Sieber propose that this kind of leadership influence has an effect on motivating both teachers and students in their efforts to be successful.

Motivational Leadership

The principal of each school maintained a visible presence and communicated with students, teachers, parents, and local community leaders. In particular, teachers in case number three spoke about the visibility of their principal and stated that he was “everywhere” to be found, including after- school activities and at sporting events (Capra, 1997). The three principals were religious personnel who had consciously committed themselves to uplifting the poor and the downtrodden. All three principals appeared to be motivated by their religious belief and sustained by the passion to spread knowledge among the indigenous people. All the three principals had degrees in education and some training in school administration. The committed presence of the religious contributed greatly to the higher retention rates in these schools.

Teachers and staff were motivated by meaningful praise and acknowledgment. The research of Barringer (206) indicates that a friendly, supportive, and committed principal can create a climate of learning. Teachers of all three schools reported that they felt supported and, as a result, felt confident to interact with the principal, not only on academic matters but also regarding their personal lives. The principals worked towards creating a strong community by involving different stakeholders of the school

(Leithwood & Riehi, 2005). According to one teacher, the principal was an open-minded sounding board if you wanted something done. The principal really cared about teachers and students and listened to them (Segiovanni, 2000). The principal wanted each and every student to graduate and wanted the teachers to do everything possible to achieve that dream.

The literature related to students at risk of dropping out of high school prior to graduation generally focuses on factors such as general deviance, poor academic achievement, family structure and support, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Osher & Baily, 2003; White-Johnson, 2001; Hansen & Toso, 2007; Zang & Law 2005). Issues external to the school that relate to early student departure have generally been linked to factors beyond the control of the school. The principals in these schools, however, seemed to have influenced both directly and indirectly some of the internal factors of the school so as to counterbalance some negative external influences.

Summary

Garnered from the data of this study are school-related factors that can enhance the retention and graduation rates of indigenous students. These schools stand out with exceptional records of retention and graduation. The factors that can be at least tentatively attributed to this phenomenon are: positive teacher - student interaction, appreciation and use of local languages by the teachers, use of indigenous symbols and literature, parental involvement, and a leadership that believes in the ability of the students to perform. In an earlier study on the dropout rates of minorities in United States, Cummins (1986) suggested that the incorporation of the students' language and culture as well as parental involvement empowered students and enabled schools to have

better academic success. In writing about cultural/linguistic incorporation, “considerable research data suggest that for dominated minorities, the extent to which students’ language and culture are incorporated into school program constitutes a significant predictor of academic success” (Cummins, 1986, p. 662). In regard to pedagogy, Cummins states that “in contrast to a pattern of classroom interaction that promotes instructional dependence, teaching that empowers will aim to liberate students from mere instruction by encouraging them to become active generators of their knowledge” (1986, p. 666).

Elements that engendered empowerment of students were seen in all three schools in the form of group discussions, projects, and outside visits that incorporated reflection. The data also provided evidence of parental and community participation in the education of their children. The belief of the principal and teachers in the capability of the children to succeed likewise had an effect on an assessment favorable to indigenous students. In addition, the pedagogical practices that incorporated local languages, images, and symbols promoted the intrinsic motivation of students to succeed. All the three schools have their limitations such as lack of pedagogically trained teachers, poor curriculum, limited resources, high student – teacher ratio, and insufficient physical structures. The findings seem to confirm the theoretical framework proposed by Cummins (1986, 2001). This study, pointing to the findings of Cummins, has implications for future policies and for the allotment of local resources that could improve the retention rate of students. This model shows that much can be done by empowering students to achieve higher graduation rates, even within the constraints of limited resources.

Implications

Implication for Educational Practice

Teaching is a complex reality, particularly among the indigenous people of Northeast India. Teachers in the participating schools not only taught their subject but also were active members of their community, ushering change and modernity into society. They were often leaders in their communities and places of worship. The teachers played vital roles in the indigenous society. Some of the effective teaching characteristics found in the study were based on competencies that incorporated care, respect, honesty, gentleness, impartiality, and commitment to their institutions. Along with these qualities were good personal communication skills and a positive and supportive approach towards students. Inclusion of programs to develop these competencies and attitudes during teacher training sessions might also have contributed towards a better retention rate, in particular among the indigenous people of Northeast India.

The incorporation of above mentioned attitudes in the interview process for admitting potential teaching candidates to a teacher's college might also have a positive effect on future retention rates. Introductory courses to assist teachers to develop professionally should include the following: contextualized pedagogy, leadership skills coupled with classroom management, and effective communication skills. These should contribute to an environment that encourages students to stay at school.

Training programs for future teachers need to incorporate various pedagogical skills that will enable them to empower students to construct knowledge on their own, even in a system that favors memorization. This is particularly important in programs for those teachers who may work with indigenous students. Teachers may also need to be

trained to involve parents in the education of their children. Teachers likewise need to be provided with an opportunity to understand and learn that students can succeed well academically, even with limited resources, provided that teachers are willing to empower them.

Implication for Policy Makers

The study revealed that inclusion of indigenous literature, signs, and symbols in the curriculum would help make schooling relevant for the students of this region. Interconnectedness among the different stake holders of the school encouraged students to stay on course and graduate. Maybe the policy makers would also have to look into the creation of smaller classrooms to facilitate better interaction. Contextualized pedagogy coupled with mastery over the subject matter created student engagement that nurtured learning and teaching. Even though teachers were committed, many of them did not have the required qualifications to teach. Policy makers might have to step in to create training and make it easily available and affordable.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study are based on three schools in two states. The study looked at one school in a city, one in a village, and a third in a medium size town. This study looked at three schools which were successful in graduating indigenous people. This study brought to light certain factors that influenced retention. These factors can be characterized as: parental support, student teacher relationship, contextualized pedagogy, relevant curriculum, connectedness, committed leadership, positive classroom management, and student support. A detailed study of more schools that are successful in

graduating their students may help future researchers identify additional key factors in retaining students.

A study of schools that have not been successful in graduating students would also provide future researchers with further information and comparative analyses to arrive at a more comprehensive method to enhance retention.

Limitations of the Research

The research had several potential limitations. First of all, the researcher only looked at three high schools in the region. Second this study only had a small sample size for interviews, focus groups and observation. Third, accessibility and constraints on time limited the exposure of the school to the researcher. The researcher had to seek assistance from another principal to complete the classroom observations. Fifth, the previous experience of the researcher in the region may have influenced the researcher's positive interpretations in this study. Sixth, the small number of participants would make it difficult to generalize this data and apply it to any other population.

The method of qualitative case study provided an opportunity for the researcher to listen to stories of teachers and students in their pursuit of knowledge and a high school diploma. It is possible that the students and teachers may not have fully shared with the unfamiliar researcher their stories of struggle, frustration, and challenges they faced at school. The selection of students and teachers was influenced by the principal and it is possible that the principal suggested names of the best students and teachers at the school who would provide information in accordance with the principal's understanding of the school. It may also be possible that teachers and students were not forthcoming or had not been honest with the researcher. Possible factors that may have influenced the response

of the participants' could be gender, ethnicity, social position of the researcher, and language.

Although there was no intention to generalize findings, cross-case analysis revealed the emergence of certain themes that should be taken into consideration when training future teachers, particularly teachers who will work among the indigenous people of Northeast India. The study reveals the tenacity of students to graduate from school even with limited resources. It is possible to increase the retention and graduation rates in schools by creating a positive environment of care in the classroom and by enriching student – teacher interactions that empower students to construct knowledge on their own.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A
Interview Questions
(Teachers)

1. What are some of the teaching techniques you use in the classroom to make learning relevant for students?
2. If a student requires any additional help (academic, financial, personal, physical/mental health) where does the student go?
3. How do you assist the underperforming students in your classroom?
4. Does your principal support your efforts both in and outside the classroom in creating an environment for learning and teaching?
5. Have there been instances of inter and/or intra tribal conflicts in your classroom and how did you handle these conflicts?
6. Are there disciplinary problems in your classroom? Are there school policies to handle discipline in the classroom?
7. In your opinion, what is the optimal class size to effectively teach students you are teaching?
8. Do you have access to technology? Please describe how you have integrated technology into the classroom?
9. In your opinion, what are the reasons you believe that students drop-out of your school?
10. What is your school doing to help students remain in school up to graduation?
11. Are you aware of school policies designed to promote respect and an appreciation for all in the school, including teachers, students, and staff?

-
12. Suppose that you are promoted to be the principal, what are the changes you would work to bring about at the school? Please explain why:
 13. What is your understanding of the indigenous worldview? Have you incorporated their way of understanding into your curriculum or pedagogy?
 14. What are the challenges that you face in imparting education to indigenous people.
 15. As an indigenous person yourself, what were the challenges that you faced in your own education? What have you done to improve the way indigenous students are taught?

Appendix B
Focus group Questions
(Students)

1. What subject do you like most?

Explain why you like that subject the most?

What subject do you like least?

Explain why you like that subject the least?
2. In what subject do you think that you learn the most? And Why?
3. What subjects have been made relevant (*need to explain*) for you?

Explain how?
4. What are the traits/characteristics that you attribute to your best teacher?

Why are these characteristics/traits important to you?
5. Do you feel that your teachers respect you and care for you? Yes ___ No ___

Please share some instance of this experience.
6. If you were the principal of this school, what changes would you make?

Explain why?
7. In your opinion, why do students drop-out out of school?
8. In your opinion, why do students drop-out of your school?
9. What do you believe the school needs to do better to retain students and see them through graduation?
10. If you need help do you believe that a teacher/school will provide you with help that you require (academic, emotional, financial etc.)?
11. How do you relate your learning with the values of your tribe?

-
12. What are the challenges that you face at school particularly because you come from a particular tribe?
 13. Can you tell us an incident or occasion where you thought that what you were learning and the way you were learning were in conflict with your tribal values?

Appendix C
Background Information Questionnaire
(Teachers)

1. Please state the name of your school: _____

2. How many years have you taught at this school? _____ Yrs.
3. Have you taught at any other school? Yes _____ No _____
4. If Yes, please name the schools _____

- 4b. For how long? _____ Yrs.
5. Check the languages you can speak:
 - a. Hindi _____
 - b. Khasi _____
 - c. Mizo _____
 - d. Other _____ Please specify _____
6. Check the ethnic category that best describes you:
 - a. Khasi _____
 - b. Mizo _____
 - c. Naga _____
 - d. Garo _____
 - e. Other _____ Please specify _____
7. Check the highest degree earned:
 - a. B.A/B.Sc/B.Com _____

-
- b. M.A/M.Sc/M.Com _____
 - c. B.Ed/M.Ed _____
 - d. Other _____ please specify _____

7a. Name of the college where the highest degree was earned? _____

8. Check the class/es that you teach at this school:

- a. Math _____
- b. English _____
- c. History _____
- d. Other _____ please specify _____

Appendix D
Background Information Questionnaire
(Students)

- 1 Please state the name of your school: _____
1. How many years have you been studying at this school? _____ Yrs.
2. Have you studied at any other school? Yes ____ No ____
3. If Yes, please name the schools _____
 1. _____
4. 4b. For how long? _____ Yrs.
5. Check the languages you can speak:
 - a. a. Hindi _____
 - b. b. Khasi _____
 - c. c. Mizo _____
 - d. d. Other _____ Please specify _____
6. Check the ethnic category that best describes you:
 - a. Khasi _____
 - b. Mizo _____
 - c. Naga _____
 - d. Garo _____
 - e. e. Other _____ Please specify _____
7. What standard are you currently studying? _____

Appendix E
Observation protocol

Appendix F

		YES	NO	Not sure	Remarks
1	Did the teacher MAP OUT the lesson on the board?				
2	Did the teacher quiet the class down and ask students to clear their desks to ensure successful TRANSITIONS?				
3	Did the teacher REVIEW the major concepts from the previous lesson and ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE?				
4	Did the teacher explain the PURPOSE of today's lesson clearly and accurately?				
5	Did the teacher ask PROCESSING QUESTIONS throughout today's lesson to CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING?				
6	Did the teacher take five minutes at the end of class to SUMMARIZE today's learning?				
7	Did the teacher ask the students to REFLECT on what they learned?				
8	Did the teacher assign work in a VERBAL and WRITTEN form?				
9	Did the teacher MODEL all of the strategies, behaviors, etc.?				
10	Did the teacher consciously support the students by focusing on their POSITIVE QUALITIES and PRAISING their efforts?				
11	Did the teacher handle PROBLEMS quickly and discreetly, treating students with RESPECT and FAIRNESS?				
13	Did the teacher create a safe, supportive ENVIRONMENT in which my students could grow and learn?				
14	Did the teacher emphasize the "SPECIALNESS" of each individual student and the group as a whole?				
15	Remarks				

Appendix F
CONSENT FORM FROM PRINCIPALS OF PARTICIPANTS

A sample of your students has been chosen to participate in a research study on “Within High Schools – Influence on retention among the indigenous people of northeast India” If you permit your students to participate in this study, they will be recruited as voluntary participants in a focus group, which is part of the research study process. The focus groups will take place on your school premises during the school hours and will be for a period of 90 minutes.

All the information disclosed in this study will remain confidential and will be reported devoid of any personal references. The focus group will be recorded in audio format. The transcripts will be shared with the focus group on a later date to ensure accuracy. The composition of the focus group, oral discussions, and typed transcripts of the tapes will be confidential. The findings of this research study will be presented in a manner that will insure anonymity to the institution, principal, students, and teachers involved in this study. Your signature on this form means that you understand the information provided and that you agree to allow your students to participate in this study. Students are free to discontinue their participation at any point in the study.

Signature of the Principal

Signature of the Researcher

Date

Appendix G
CONSENT FORM FROM PRINCIPALS OF PARTICIPANTS
(Teachers)

A sample of your teachers has been chosen to voluntarily participate in a research study on “Within High Schools – Influence on retention among the indigenous people of northeast India” If you permit your teachers to participate in this study, they will be recruited as participants in an interview, which is part of the research study process. The interviews will take place on your school premises during the school hours and will be for a period of 90 minutes. They are free to discontinue their participation any time during the study.

All the information disclosed in this study will remain confidential and will be reported devoid of any personal references. The interviews will be recorded in audio format. The transcripts will be shared with the teachers on a later date to ensure accuracy. The interviews, tapes, and transcripts will be confidential and held in a secure place until the study is completed. They will be destroyed shortly after the study is approved. The findings of the study will be presented in a manner that will insure anonymity to the institution, principal, teachers, and students. Your signature on this form means that you understand the information provided and that you agree to allow your teachers to participate in this study.

Signature of the Principal

Signature of the Researcher

Date

Appendix H
CONSENT FORM FROM PRINCIPALS OF PARTICIPANTS
(Documents)

Your school has been chosen to participate in a research study on “Within High Schools – Influence on retention among the indigenous people of northeast India” If you decide to participate in this study, I need to have access to documents and data that may be relevant to the study. I will not take the original documents out of the school premises.

All the information disclosed in these documents will remain confidential and will be reported devoid of any personal references. The findings of this study will be presented in a manner that will insure anonymity to the institution, principal, teachers, and students. Your signature on this form means that you understand the information provided and that you agree to allow access to documents and data that may be relevant to the study.

If you need any further information, please feel free to contact me at Holy Cross House, Brookdene, Jowai Road, Shillong. Meghalaya 793003. Ph (0381)2226529, pudusseryp@gmail.com or Dr. Starratt at robert.starratt.1@bc.edu

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research.

Signature of the Principal

Signature of the Researcher

Date

Appendix I
Contact letter
(Parents)

Dear

I am a doctoral candidate at Lynch School of Education at Boston College. I am conducting a multi-case study of the teaching practices that characterize high schools with successful records for graduating indigenous pupils of Northeast India. I also want to study how the school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, and teacher workload influence the teaching practices connected to high retention rates.

I am inviting your child to participate in my study. If you agree to, I will interview your child on your school campus for approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be recorded on audio format. On a later date, I will share with your child the transcripts of the interview to check for accuracy. Your child's participation in this research will be confidential. Only the research team will have access to your interview, records, and transcript. The analysis and discussions of the interview will be presented in such a manner as to ensure personal and institutional anonymity. You will be free to withdraw your child at any time from participating in this study.

Please return to me the filled attached form with your signature indicating your consent. Upon receiving the form, I will contact your child and set up a mutually convenient time for the group interview. If you need any further information, please feel free to contact me at Holy Cross House, Brookdene, Jowai Road, Shillong. Meghalaya 793003. Ph (0381)2226529, pudusseryp@gmail.com.

Thank you for considering participation in this research. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely

Fr. Paul Pudussery. CSC
Doctoral Candidate
Boston College.
Boston, USA.

Appendix J
Boston College Consent Form
(Parents consent form allowing child's participation)

Title of Study:

WITHIN HIGH SCHOOLS - - INFLUENCES ON RETENTION AMONG THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF NORTHEAST INDIA

Name of Investigator: Paul Pudussery, csc

Introduction

The study is prompted by a 78.97% dropout rate among the indigenous people of northeast India as reported in the selected educational statistics of 2004 -2005 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2007). This study will identify and profile the characteristics inherent in the teaching practices used by the teachers in educating a very low achieving subpopulation in India. Some schools in this region stand out as successful schools that are effective in working with the indigenous tribal children of northeast India. The presumption is that the best institutional practices for teaching, school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, performance assessment, and teacher workload have an overall effect on student retention.

Purpose of Study:

Through this project, the researcher hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the practices that lead to a greater retention rate among the indigenous people of northeast India.

Description of Study Procedures:

It is the intention of the researcher to have focus groups of six to eight students in three schools. The questions asked each group will focus on the teaching practices that characterize high schools with successful records for graduating indigenous pupils of Northeast India. It will also focus on how these teaching practices are affected by school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, and teacher workload. All questions will be open ended. A sample question is as follows: In what subject do you think that you learn the most? And Why?

Participation in this study will involve at least 90 minutes of your child's time. There are no major risks for you or for your child from participating in this study. However, the study may include risks that are unknown at this time. Your child's answers to the questions will not be seen by anyone but the people working on this study. Neither your principal, teachers, nor students, nor anyone else, will have access to your child's answers

The interview will be recorded in audio format, which will be transcribed in English for subsequent analysis by the researcher.

Benefits of Being in Study:

You will have no direct benefit from this study, though indirectly everyone involved in education will benefit.

Payments:

Your child will be given no financial remuneration to participate in this study.

Costs:

There is no cost to you or to your child to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

Your child's answers to the questions will not be seen by anyone but the people working on this study. Neither your principal, teachers, nor students, nor anyone else, will have access to your answers. All information obtained from this study will be confidential. All notes, tapes and documents linked to this specific study will be stored in safe custody and destroyed shortly after the study has been completed.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

All participants in this study do so voluntarily. Participants may choose to withdraw from this study at any given time.

Dismissal From Study:

If your child do not follow the instructions that are given will be dismissed from the study. OR If the study sponsor decides to stop or cancel the study you will be dismissed from the study.

Contacts and Questions:

This study is conducted under the direction of Dr. Robert Starratt, Professor at Boston College. Any questions concerning this study may be addressed to the researcher at pudusseryp@gmail.com , 011 91 364 2226529 or to Dr. Starratt at Robert.starratt.1@bc.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

Your child has volunteered to participate in this study. So I request your consent as a parent/guardian to allow your child to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to my child to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) : _____

Parent/Guardian (Print Name): _____

Parent/Guardian (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Appendix K
Students Assent form

Title of Study:

WITHIN HIGH SCHOOLS - - INFLUENCES ON RETENTION AMONG THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF NORTHEAST INDIA

Name of Investigator: Paul Pudussery, csc

Introduction

The study is prompted by a 78.97% dropout rate among the indigenous people of northeast India as reported in the selected educational statistics of 2004 -2005 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2007). This study will identify and profile the characteristics inherent in the teaching practices used by the teachers in educating a very low achieving subpopulation in India. Some schools in this region stand out as successful schools that are effective in working with the indigenous tribal children of northeast India. The presumption is that the best institutional practices for teaching, school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, performance assessment, and teacher workload have an overall effect on student retention.

Purpose of Study:

Through this project, the researcher hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the practices that lead to a greater retention rate among the indigenous people of northeast India.

Description of Study Procedures:

It is the intention of the researcher to have focus groups of six to eight students in three schools.. The questions asked each teacher will focus on the teaching practices that characterize high schools with successful records for graduating indigenous pupils of Northeast India. It will also focus on how these teaching practices are affected by school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, and teacher workload. All questions will be open ended. A sample question is as follows: What are the pedagogical techniques you use to make learning relevant for students?

Participation in this study will involve at least 90 minutes of your time. There are no major risks for you from participating in this study. However, the study may include risks that are unknown at this time. Your answers to the questions will not be seen by anyone but the people working on this study. Neither your principal, teachers, nor students, nor anyone else, will have access to your answers. The interview will be recorded in audio format, which will be transcribed in English for subsequent analysis by the researcher.

Benefits of Being in Study:

You will have no direct benefit from this study, though indirectly everyone involved in education will benefit.

Payments:

You will be given no financial remuneration to participate in this study.

Costs:

There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

Your answers to the questions will not be seen by anyone but the people working on this study. Neither your principal, teachers, nor students, nor anyone else, will have access to your answers. All information obtained from this study will be confidential. All notes, tapes and documents linked to this specific study will be stored in safe custody and destroyed shortly after the study has been completed.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

All participants in this study do so voluntarily. Participants may choose to withdraw from this study at any given time.

Dismissal From Study:

If you do not follow the instructions you are given you will be dismissed from the study. OR If the study sponsor decides to stop or cancel the study you will be dismissed from the study

Contacts and Questions:

This study is conducted under the direction of Dr. Robert Starratt, Professor at Boston College. Any questions concerning this study may be addressed to the researcher at pudusseryp@gmail.com , 011 91 364 2226529 or to Dr. Starratt at Robert.starratt.1@bc.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) : _____

Date _____

Witness/Auditor (Signature): _____

Date _____

Appendix L
Consent Form (Teachers)

Title of Study:

WITHIN HIGH SCHOOLS - - INFLUENCES ON RETENTION AMONG THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF NORTHEAST INDIA

Name of Investigator: Paul Pudussery, csc

Introduction

The study is prompted by a 78.97% dropout rate among the indigenous people of northeast India as reported in the selected educational statistics of 2004 -2005 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2007). This study will identify and profile the characteristics inherent in the teaching practices used by the teachers in educating a very low achieving subpopulation in India. Some schools in this region stand out as successful schools that are effective in working with the indigenous tribal children of northeast India. The presumption is that the best institutional practices for teaching, school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, performance assessment, and teacher workload have an overall effect on student retention.

Purpose of Study:

Through this project, the researcher hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the practices that lead to a greater retention rate among the indigenous people of northeast India.

Description of Study Procedures:

It is the intention of the researcher to interview a sample of teachers from the three schools. The questions asked each teacher will focus on the teaching practices that characterize high schools with successful records for graduating indigenous pupils of Northeast India. It will also focus on how these teaching practices are affected by school leadership, physical facilities, school culture, class size, and teacher workload. All questions will be open ended. A sample question is as follows: What pedagogical techniques do you use to make learning relevant for students?

Participation in this study will involve at least 90 minutes of your time. There are no major risks for you from participating in this study. However, the study may include risks that are unknown at this time. Your answers to the questions will not be seen by anyone but the people working on this study. Neither your principal, teachers, nor students, nor anyone else, will have access to your answers.

The interview will be recorded in audio format, which will be transcribed in English for subsequent analysis by the researcher.

Benefits of Being in Study:

You will have no direct benefit from this study, though indirectly everyone involved in education will benefit.

Payments:

You will be given a gift certificate to the value of Rs: 250.00

Costs:

There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

Your answers to the questions will not be seen by anyone but the people working on this study. Neither your principal, teachers, nor students, nor anyone else, will have access to your answers. All information obtained from this study will be confidential. All notes, tapes and documents linked to this specific study will be stored in safe custody and destroyed shortly after the study has been completed.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

All participants of this study do so voluntarily. Participants may choose to withdraw from this study at any given time.

Dismissal From Study:

If you do not follow the instructions you are given, you will be dismissed from the study. Likewise, If the study sponsor decides to stop or cancel the study, you will be dismissed from the study

Contacts and Questions:

This study is conducted under the direction of Dr. Robert Starratt, Professor at Boston College. Any questions concerning this study may be addressed to the researcher at pudusseryp@gmail.com , 011 91 364 2226529 or to Dr. Robert J. Starratt: Robert.starratt.1@bc.edu

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If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name) : _____

Date _____

Witness/Auditor (Signature): _____

Date _____