

Research Focus

Emphasizing in the field of education, I am looking for organizations that seek out or are already practicing holistic ministry/development and are open to new approaches of learning. Each of the following organizations is within Delhi, India. They each receive some form of external, Western funding and are led by local Indian leadership. I will emphasize, for each organization, potential strengths and weaknesses that I foresee in the research process. I have chosen three organizations that work in the field of education. I have been able to meet with each of the leaders from the organizations. My goal is to further develop the idea of holistic education in India, and defining what this looks like biblically and from a critical pedagogical approach. This requires rich and detailed analyses of parent, teacher, and student perspectives on schooling, as well as an intimate understanding of how schools are managed.

Agency #1: Mission to the Unreached

I have had the pleasure of sitting down with Dr. Thomas Varghese to discuss not only the vision of *Mission to the Unreached* (MTU), but also the goal(s) over the next twenty years. This projection has helped me identify potential areas of growth and where the organization already stands strongly. My development of a research thesis is then much more strongly rooted in the essentials of the organization, working more in line with meeting their needs, instead of coming in with my own plans and desires.



Picture 1: Taken From:
<http://mtuthomas.com>



Picture 2: Taken From:
<http://mtuthomas.com>

MTU strives to break down the barriers of lying, which is so prevalent amongst Hindu and Indian culture. Due to religious customs, the practice of lying is seen as a cunning and desirable quality to have, because it resembles that of the Hindu gods. The organization recognizes this weakness within their culture and combats this issue by modeling Christ in their own actions. For example, when parents from their school request loans for assistance, the NGO is honest with their situation by sharing that they do not have the extra funds to allocate the money to the individuals. Instead, they find creative ways to support the family through the means of their business, which is

already budgeted for. This is a way to create a trusting reputation of how the NGO carefully manages their funds and is transparent in their communication among the community. [1]¹

The director of the NGO is constantly looking for ways to address the needs of the slum community he works within. This is why he opened up a slum school, because he saw the lack of opportunity for a right to education among the Dalit community, the dominant caste that he works among. [2]

¹ Corresponds with the numbered questions found in *Appendix A: Questioned Answered for Each Organization*.

Any external association does not officially recognize MTU. However, the organization is well respected within the community. Parents, families, and business owners understand that the organization is a reputable establishment. People from Hindu backgrounds, within the community, have approached the Christian director for help, because they have identified him –from the outside- as a safe and trustworthy source. This says a lot about MTU’s reputation and perception from the surrounding community members, not directly associated with the NGO. This creates an unofficial model that is well received by the public. [3]



Picture 3: Taken From:
<http://mtuthomas.com>

The organization provides an inclusive environment, accepting students from all religious backgrounds including mostly Hindus and Muslims. As a Christian institution, they integrate multiple ranges of caste, and bring about diverse populations. However, the staff is a mostly Christian. Nonetheless, the parents and students reflect a myriad of backgrounds. [4]



Picture 4: Taken From:
<http://mtuthomas.com>

MTU makes multiple attempts of involving their students’ parents through a variety of outreach opportunities. They have offered vocational trainings, meetings for parent support, and other resourceful opportunities. This is effort to help meet the needs of the community and to give an opportunity for social and economical uplift. For example, many mothers of the students were in need of jobs to help support their families. As a result of this community need, the organization brought in a professional representative to train the women to become sales representative for a company. They

trained the women, in business, and extended them the resources necessary to start working from their homes. This type of support brings about change in areas of need or struggle. It is also a demonstration of how MTU offers community members the opportunity to grow and engage with their surroundings. [5]

The organization has a highly diverse staff, including teachers across the country, from Mumbai and Orissa, to Kerala. As a result, there is a presence of multilingualism due to the range of states. Their backgrounds range from pastors, educators, and social workers. Their varied backgrounds offer a unique perspective to work and grow alongside. [6]

After speaking with the director, he is open to research with the organization and has been honest about the possibilities for further growth. MTU is an excellent opportunity to walk alongside an indigenous, NGO that follows a holistic model for development. There are many seasoned leaders that I would be able to learn from and seek advice from. The NGO finds it beneficial to conduct research in the field of education and sees potential in better understanding student and teacher relationships, and the director understands that it would require exploring teacher perspectives and attitudes.

Agency#2: Dynamic Learning Center

Heidi and Randall Long are the main leaders of *Dynamic Learning Center*, a language learning school, nestled in Okhla, (East) Delhi, and a primarily Muslim



Picture 5: Taken From:
<https://www.dynamicindia.com>

population. I was able to sit down with them and have them share a little bit about themselves and their vision for their organization. They are currently in the process of trying to take over the title of the organization and hope to do so in the next 2-3 years. This transition would allow more freedom in their curriculum and their approach to English language development. Their goal is to build English-speaking skills, in low-income communities, to help mobilize people through the means of education.



Picture 6: Taken From:
<https://www.dynamicindia.com>

The organizers are very transparent when it comes to their faith and influences of their journey. Even though they work with Muslims, they openly share their faith as a way to practice the English language. As Christian leaders, they understand that the secular, language-learning setting is best, given the context, as an evangelical tool. The students and patrons of the organization are fully aware of Heidi and Randall's faith-based influence. Community members have even said that they are known as the people who love Jesus, but that is ok because the organizers shared that they are not trying to hide who they are and as a result, the community respects them. Their rates for service and curriculum

are trusted within the community because Dynamic has produced quality results. They are able to navigate their faith within the content of their business because they are a reliable source for producing high level, English-speaking skills. [1]

They work very hard to maintain a respected view from a secular standing, but discreetly work towards evangelism through their Global Café program. The Global Café is a bi-monthly meeting where students are invited to come for chai and conversation to help build their speaking skills in English. Since this is a free-of-charge event, students are encouraged to bring friends and/or family to build their English skills as well.

This approach is used as an evangelical tool to help open up spiritual conversation through the exploration of language. Each setup is approximately 2 hours long and is based around a new topic and word choice. For example, the word may be *advice*. This word is defined. It is used in a sentence and perhaps a quote is shared that uses it in its proper context. Then there are a series of questions that revolve around the word. Such as, "Who do you seek *advice* from regarding relationships?" "Whom do you seek spiritual *advice* from?" This leads the opportunity for open conversations about the participants' personal lives and testimonies. This grants the Christian facilitator the opportunity to dive into ministry outreach. This brings about the conversation of God in a non-threatening environment. [2]

The organization works with a variety of backgrounds, from low to high profile examples. They approach language learning through an American structure and curriculum, which provides a model for success. They are known to work with lawyers, politicians, students, and people just looking to learn and improve their English-speaking capability. They are explicit about being sensitive and conservative to the needs of the community, while still maintaining American standards. [3]

Heidi and Randall Long are both Americans who lead the organization, but alongside them, they also work with natives of



Picture 7: Taken From:
<https://www.dynamicindia.com>

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India. Their language teacher, admissions counselor, and maintenance worker are all locals of Delhi. A unique aspect of *Dynamic* is that they highlight their cleaning staff, which in Indian society, the “dirtier” the job, the lower the caste association. This demonstrates the organization’s ability to break social and cultural barriers, by being inclusive of all castes. The practice of acknowledging human worth is a bold and intentional move on behalf of the organizers. This says a lot in Indian culture. [4]



Picture 8: Taken From:
<https://www.dynamicindia.com>

Dynamic Learning Center makes every effort to help improve the skills of the local community. By offering services, paid and unpaid, *Dynamic* illustrates its intention of improving the lives of its community through the form of education. By building English skills, community members are then better equipped for the job market, among other peers, and within organizational opportunities. The English language is a mobilizer, which helps enhance poor communities. Programs like Global Café bring all backgrounds together in effort to push for critical thinking and improving one’s self in order to help others. Their classes offer the opportunity for community members to become deeply engaged with their community for social situations, such as work-related interviews or simple conflict resolution opportunities between friends and family. The ability to properly communicate is an essential tool to a community. *Dynamic* looks at the learner’s personal experience(s) to help draw authentic participation. There is practical engagement that is meant to mirror every day life in which the learners can relate to and apply immediately. [5]

Dynamic is supported by a number of outside researchers. The methodology of their schooling is from a modern approach, including the use of sociocultural learning theory. The curriculum depends on the learner’s environment(s) to evoke practical understanding. The hands-on approach is practiced through group activities and pair sharing, relying on the social interactions of the classroom. This innovative model demonstrates *Dynamic’s* sensitivity to healthy classroom environments and recent studies regarding what brings about conducive learning environments. Educated Westerners and locals are both involved with the feedback of the organization and are consistently looking to stay up-to-date with their style of teaching and coursework presented. [6]

After speaking with Heidi and Randall, I was encouraged for future work with the organization. They were open to potential teachings of biblical principles within their English curriculum. This could lead to potentially implementing a holistic vision within their curriculum, using the 10 biblical principles used for previous coursework. Since they already practice a critically engaged classroom, this would only further walk alongside what the organization is already doing, but perhaps on a more advance level. The benefit is that I would be able to use my English to my advantage in a Hindi/Urdu context. My concern is that the organization is restricted to English services and would not be able to expand in a holistic vision with curriculum. I look forward to keeping this door open with the organization. If this is not my main focus for thesis work, I will definitely continue to attend *Dynamic’s* Global Café sessions for potential observations of practices, questions for the organization, and surveys of the community.

Agency #3: Gregory Memorial School

Alka Hammid, a supervisor and first standard teacher, runs *Gregory Memorial School*. It is a slum school, east of Kailash, in New Delhi. The school runs from nursery to second standard. With just under 50 students and six teachers, the school is still under its five-year development, from inception. The school's vision is to serve the poor, through the means of adequate provision, including proper buildings and living conditions.



Picture 9: Taken From:
<http://www.satbhaktitrust.org/school.html>

The organization works in a slum community of Hindu, low-caste members. They are known publically as a Christian school and accepted in the community for their work to help the needy and disadvantaged. The community recognizes the school as 'different', in the sense that they aim to help those in need through the convictions of their beliefs, in effort to model Christ. This reputation is very clear and well received from families. Their use of external funding and supporters is very explicit, causing a stable form of income for the school and staff. [1]



Picture 10: Taken From:
<http://www.satbhaktitrust.org/school.html>

The school implements the gospel into their daily curriculum. They share bible stories with the children and look to improve the livelihood of the child by focusing on their proper hygiene and care, a more holistic vision for education. For example, while speaking with Alka, she shared a recent experience that demonstrated this very practice. During the frosty bite of the Delhi winter, the parents shared their needs of wanting to keep their children at home to avoid the cold. Alka responded to the conditions by closing the school for two days. This was because the

students were so cold on the floor and this put the children in danger. She knew the well-being of the child was a part of running a successful organization. She chose what she thought best suit the needs of the children and listened to the community at large, including teachers and parents. *Gregory Memorial School* aims to address community needs and areas of improvement, based on constant evaluation. [2]

As Christian workers, the organization aims to demonstrate Christ-centered values and principles within the classrooms. This model of behavior and development has naturally encouraged a more holistic view. This has helped the teachers gain a more positive mindset of their students because they see them as God's creation, each unique in His image. This perspective brings value to the classroom and encourages the child to be a learner. In many public schools, the teacher often does not hold value in low-caste societies, causing many children to leave school and work on the streets from an early age. Hence, this model of Christ-centered learning has shifted not only the mindsets of the teachers, but also of the students and parents. The families may not publically come to faith, but they see the unique approach and value the education received at *Gregory Memorial*. [3]

The students are primarily from Hindu backgrounds. As a Christian school, *Gregory Memorial* strives to reach out to all walks of faith through the means of education. They openly share Christian values through their curriculum and still meet the needs of parents from low-

income and low-caste communities. This correspondence allows for a more open reception on the parents' behalf because they see the school's investment in their children. Despite religious differences, parents remain open to the school's teachings because they have learned about the value of an education for their child(ren). [4]

The staff is very sensitive to the needs of the students and parents of the school. They go beyond the educational needs and consider the physical, mental, social, and spiritual development of the families involved. They look towards better improving the conditions of the families by providing hygiene education, scripture lessons, and by supporting the child's unique personality by knowing them firsthand. This meets a large spectrum of needs for a student and parent, which promotes a healthy learning environment for the children. This gears toward my thesis proposal of holistic learning, by gauging with multidimensional aspects of learning and everyday life. [5]

The teacher staff is predominantly Hindi speaking. Some teachers are proficient in English, and all are native. Some teachers and staff are formally trained in the education system for teaching, while others have seminary school with no formal teacher training. Considering the background of the staff, I do not see an easy provision of outside research and support. This limits the potential research and development that could occur within the organization. [6]

Overall, the opportunity to work with *Gregory Memorial School* would be an excellent opportunity to see a slum school's style and approach to learning, teaching, and parent involvement. I think observing Hindu backgrounds of families, in a Christian school, would be helpful for observations regarding attitudes and mindsets toward teacher roles and student expectations (from parents, teachers, and students). My concern with this organization is that there is still a lot of work to be done to help build the foundational groundwork of the school and its curriculum. Since the school is only four years old, I still see a lot of molding that needs to be done and I do not necessarily see an expert that would be able to oversee me. I feel as if I would need a more knowledgeable resource in the field, in order to be on the forefront of development with the school.



Picture 11: Taken From
<http://www.satbhaktitrust.org/school.html>

Conclusion

Based on this thorough analysis, I feel that *Mission to the Unreached* is my best option for further research and development. MTU has the proper balance of indigenous leadership and is familiar with western mindsets in a way that would help keep an open mind about potential projects. Since I have been working with this organization for 10 months now, I have built trust and understanding from the organization. This has led to many open doors and opportunities for development. The organization's honesty and opinion is appreciated in times of deliberation and discussion, because it helps gauge a better understanding of the culture and the context.

MTU's belief in hands-on learning also matches the style and approach of MATUL. I think this will be an excellent fit to further enhance my research skills, but more importantly serve the community, which will actually receive direct benefits from the labor. They encourage practical learning and see us as soldiers on the battlefield. As Dr. Varghese states, "You cannot be a soldier and work in an office. You have to be willing to go outside of the four walls."

Appendix A: Questions Answered for Each Organization

[1] Does the organization and its leadership enjoy a reputation in the host community for being honest and sincere, without evidences of misconduct related to fund use, management, and governance? [Legitimate]

[2] Does the organization address specific community dilemmas and risks (e.g. evangelism, ill health, failing schools, economic shocks, human rights abuses, land tenure)? [Problem-focused]

[3] Is the organization acknowledged as a “model” of best practices and effectiveness in that specific sector of development? [Exemplary]

[4] Does the organization include, in both its staff and beneficiaries, a cross-section of community residents, crossing tribal, religious, and caste differences? [Public]

[5] Does the organization involve local residents in defining and carrying out an agenda for community improvement? [Participatory]

[6] Does the organization have bilingual national staff who are able and willing to provide outside researchers expert supervision and feedback? [Supervised]