

DIVERGENCES BETWEEN SRI SRI VIDYA MANDIR SCHOOL AND OTHER SCHOOLS CONCERNING HOLISTIC EDUCATION - A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Soma Gol

Assistant Professor, B.Ed. Section, Kalna College,
Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal.

Dr. Biswajit Chatterjee

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Raiganj University,
Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal.

ABSTRACT

The ‘Critical Ethnography’ is a paradigm of ethnographic studies where the nearby places, dwellings, family situations, formal and informal establishments are studied. The Chicago school of sociologists introduced this in the 1930’s. In this study, a divergence was presented between Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School, Jharkhand and some other schools of West Bengal, keeping in view the Holistic Education pattern like its facets, facts, educational patterns, co-curricular activities, relationships among all stakeholders and values, enshrined in those institutions. The objective of the study was to compare some selected schools of West Bengal including of RKM background schools with Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School. ‘Critical Ethnographic Research’ under Qualitative Research was adopted in which the interview and participant’s observation techniques were used to study the Holistic Education. Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School from Jharkhand and 8 Bengali medium secondary schools from West Bengal were purposefully selected from eight different randomly selected districts. A total of 24 teachers & 20 students from both ends were interviewed for this study apart from the observation techniques in those schools. The study revealed that Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School is very much unique in its nature compared with the other schools concerning Holistic Education. The study also revealed that except the RKM contextual schools, all other schools are lacking in most of the bases or characteristics of Holistic Education.

Keywords: Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School, Holistic Education, Critical Ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic research usually takes a cultural lens and deals with the exploration of people’s lives and the diversity of human cultures within their communities in their particular cultural

settings. It developed in early anthropological field research and was carried out in non-western cultures. In the 1930s, the critical Chicago school of sociologists introduced a new paradigm of ethnographic studies, where they started to explore their own nearby corners just as if they were unknown places (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Thomas, 1993). Currently, the topics of ethnographic research can be anywhere, including familiar settings, including formal and informal organizations such as workplaces, educational institutions, social organizations, fan clubs, trade fairs, shopping centres and even social media. This paradigm of ethnography is better known as Critical Ethnography (Creswell, 2007).

Sri Sri Vidya Mandir Schools are the cluster of schools under Sri Sri Ravishankar Vidya Mandir (SSRVM) Trust as one of the educational wings of the Art of Living (AoL) organization to promote holistic education in a stress-free and child-friendly environment. The present researcher particularly selected Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School of Hendaajuri, Ghatsila in the state of Jharkhand, under the Tribal School Project of Vyakti Vikas Kendra India (VVKI), an initiative by the Art of Living (AoL) Organization. Here, ‘Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School’ is used by the researchers as the simplified nomenclature of ‘Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School of Hendaajuri, Ghatsila in Jharkhand’ in some parts of their writings. Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School of Hendaajuri is mainly educating the tribal community of the area. Uneducated and illiterate, tribal people found the languages, laws and regulations, economic transactions, and the intact way of conducting life completely unfamiliar and several persons lost their land. So, it seems that the ‘developments’ introduced or affected upon them are meant to benefit the ‘outsiders’, at the expense of the indigenous tribal community. Life for them will never go back to the old way (“Seva Mandir Projects”, n.d.).

Holistic Education simply means cultivating the whole person and helping individuals live more consciously within their communities & natural ecosystems. This education is interested in cultivating spirituality, reverence for the natural environment & a sense of social justice. It also seeks to inspire children’s creativity, thoughts, compassion, self-knowledge, social skills, arousal of democratic awareness and emotional stability (Miller, 1990). A divergent study was aimed between Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School and some other schools of West Bengal, keeping in view the Holistic Education pattern like its facets, facts, educational patterns, co-curricular activities, relationships among all stakeholders and values, enshrined in those institutions.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How is Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School distinctive from other schools concerning Holistic Education?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To explore and compare Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School with other schools concerning Holistic Education.

METHODOLOGY

‘Critical Ethnographic Research’ under Qualitative Research was adopted in which the Interview and Participant’s Observation techniques were used to study Holistic Education in Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School of Jharkhand and some other schools in West Bengal. After reviewing the existing related literature some characteristics or bases were finalized. The data for this study were collected from Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School, Hengaljuri, Jharkhand and in West Bengal, that data were collected from 8 Bengali medium secondary schools, among those 4 schools were from Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) background. These schools were purposefully selected from eight different randomly selected districts of West Bengal namely, Purba Bardhaman, Nadia, Murshidabad, Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum, Howrah and Hooghly. It is here also to be mentioned that, for better comparison regarding the bases of holistic education, these schools were selected in view of their variations in their last board results and keeping in mind the quintessence and comparability provision relating with Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School. At the outset, 12 secondary school teachers and 10 students were randomly selected for interviews from Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School and another 12 secondary school teachers and 10 students were randomly selected for interviews from 8 different Bengali medium secondary schools of the districts mentioned above. At the same time, these selected schools were observed also in this research. From both states, 24 teachers & 20 students were interviewed for this study which accounts altogether of 44 participants, which is sturdy enough, according to the researchers, for any qualitative research to proceed & to obtain a finer result or better suggestion. Three standardized tools were used in this research. Two interview schedules were developed and used for students and school teachers respectively along with an observation schedule for participatory observation. As per the essence of qualitative research, content analyses were followed thoroughly.

FINDINGS

From the analyses of the entire transcribed interview data from the teachers & students of Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School & other schools including some RKM contextual schools and also the observed data observed extensively by the researchers in Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School & other schools regarding the bases of Holistic Education, the following findings were revealed. Here all the categories from both ends are generated & presented from the interview data and the observation data are also indicated side by side for the purpose of comparability.

Table 1 : Corroborated Findings regarding the Comparability between Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School and some other schools regarding the Bases of Holistic Education			
Generated Categories from Interview Data of Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School	Generated Categories from Interview Data of Other selected Schools	Generated Observation Data of Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School	Generated Observation Data of Other selected Schools
Community/Global Connectedness			
Connection with the Community	Communiqué with Parents	• Different Programmes are organized with cooperation & participation with nearby schools. • Parent Teacher Association is there.	• Communication with other nearby schools during only board exams and public celebrations. • Some schools do have not that communication also. • Some schools have strong PTA with conscious guardians but others are not much mindful of that.
	Tangential Activities	• Teachers maintain communication with every guardian on regular basis. • School organizes social awareness Programmes in nearby villages. • School arranges excursions at colleges, universities and Ashram every year.	• Short excursion is organized in some schools. • Other only implements government orders.
Emotional Stability			
Emotional Balance	Deficient Mental Support	• Students take midday meals in the queue with patients. • They help each other to take their meals. • Teachers help students with stress.	• In most of the schools except RKM schools' students are undisciplined in a queue. • Teachers have to use a stick or so to stare them in those cases.

Mental Stability	Mediocre Emotional Poise	• Teachers suggest techniques to overcome stress. • Students like to face challenges. • In problematic situations, teachers empathically help students to overcome.	• Exam-time stress is prevalent for some students. • Excluding some insensible teachers, teachers & Maharajs are helpful in this regard. • Except few evading teachers, teachers & Maharajs help students in their problematic situations.
Self-Consciousness			
Education on Democracy			
Participatory Democracy	Democratic Practice	• Class council & school council are very active. • Election of a class monitor is followed through the democratic process. • Students are familiar with the preamble of the Indian Constitution. • Learners express their opinion freely in classes. • School curriculum provides the notion of democracy.	• No active school councils or class councils in some schools. • Some schools have both school councils and class councils. • Selection of class monitor is followed through a democratic and/or autocratic process. • Teachers usually do not allow students to express their opinion freely in some schools. • The compositions of several classes are still teacher-centric. • School curriculum provides the notion of democracy.
Good Citizenship	Freedom of Choice		
Freedom of Choice			

Value-based Learning			
Moral Development	Flux of Values	• Practices of Prayer, Yoga & Pranayama. • In daily prayer, famous quotations and spiritual dialects of educationists, philosophers, and spiritual gurus are read	• Practice of Morning Prayer at the beginning, in each school. • Yoga and Pranayama are practiced in few schools. • But few teachers & students are seen coming after the prayer in some schools.
Escalation of Values	Distrusting Morality	• Petite quiz questions are asked in the morning assembly. • News highlights are presented in the morning assembly. • The prayer is ended with the singing of the National Anthem. • Teachers & learners participate in religious occasions. • Students follow school rules & regulations efficiently. • Students are not in the practice of telling lies.	• Students & teachers participate joyfully in religious occasions except for some students of their guardians' prohibition. • Students follow rules & regulations with some exceptions from time to time. • Interestingly, sometimes teachers do not abide by the rules in the schools. • Some students practice telling lies. • School library is quite non-functional except for the RKM schools.
Character Building	Character Shaping	• Student has the habit of reading story books and Classics.	• Some students read Classics & story books through the influence of their guardians. • Very few teachers encourage students to read story books.

Peace Education			
Culture of Peace	Nonviolence Oblique	• Corporal punishments are prohibited. • Teachers used to make them understand what they should or should not do. • If punishments are rarely given, it is given in the form of academic activities.	• Students are unmanageable in some schools. • In some cases, teachers have to give physical punishment to some errant students. • Self-discipline is not followed by the students in some schools.
Self Help	Practice of Peace	• Students usually pursue the practice of self-discipline.	• Students quarrel quite naturally with each other. • And then they go to complain to teachers.
Sustainable Outlook	Sustainability	• They quarrel quite naturally with each other but not too extensively. • Teachers seldom intervene in resolving quarrels. • Bullying is totally absent.	• Class monitors cannot control the class properly. • Only in girls' schools and in RKM schools these situations are not too bad.
Learning of Social Responsibility			
Social Responsibility	Social Erudition	• Learners feel that all religions are the same. • According to them, the basic beliefs of all religions are doing well for mankind. • They take active participation in the social gatherings of all religions in school and also in the community.	• Differences between dissimilar religions exist amongst some students. • Some students are flexible regarding diverse religions. • The spirit of cooperation is upbeat amongst the students, especially in RKM Schools.
	Shared Accountability		

Environment Cognizant	Ecological Awareness	• They help each other in every daily assignment. • They gladly do their duty also. • Teachers & students are concerned about the environment.	• Students are not much aware about the environment or the environmental issues of present period. • Gardening & cleaning in the campus are also not followed by every school except the RKM schools.
		• They organize environmental awareness Programmes with the active participation of nearby villagers.	• But some schools are constantly following the process of cleaning & gardening like RKM schools.
		• School organizes debates and discussions about environmental consciousness among students each year.	• In those schools, students are also very mindful about caring for their schools' premises.
Compassion/Empathy			
Sensitiveness	Incomprehension	• Teachers and students do their duties faithfully. • They are very much loyal to their institution. It's like a <i>Mandir</i> to them. • Students are dependent on their teachers for academic requirements and social & emotional support.	• Some students are loyal to each other. • They are devoted to their school also. • But not everyone is truthful. • Some teachers & Maharajs are also very faithful about their duties to their students and schools. But few teachers are very laid-back.
		• Teachers help their students in a troublesome situation.	• Some teachers & Maharajs are helpful in students' troubled situations.

Judicious Notion	Commiseration	• Students used to share story books among themselves. • On some special occasions, they share homemade special foodstuffs with their friends, irrespective of religions, race and creed.	• But few teachers don't want to take any responsibilities. They just want to inform their guardian first. • Students love to share foods, books, pen etc. with their friends with some exemption.
Empathetic	Compassion		

DISCUSSION

It was comprehended that where Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School maintains the community/province connectedness effectively with the limitation of global connectedness, but the other selected schools, in regards of communication with other schools or communities, a mixed result among the schools were recorded. It was also found that a well-balanced emotional stability is being maintained for students and teachers in Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School, whereas keeping in mind some observed bipolar characteristics among those selected schools it can be concluded that in some of the schools the bases of emotional stability is maintained especially in RKM background schools but in rest of the schools, it is little of lacking. It was also found that in Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School, the democratic practices or the education on democracy is generously imparting towards the students and in most of the selected schools also the democratic attitude is mirrored. The invaluable component, value-based learning was being highly incorporated towards the students of Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School. However, with some glitches, value education is being imparted to the students of other selected schools also, especially in RKM background schools. Through some insignias it can be assumed that the culture of peace education is well cultivating in the Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School but in other selected schools except in RKM background schools, partly of the peace education is inculcating towards their students. The results from both sides of findings signify that among several of the characteristic features of learning social responsibility a few were lacking in Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School & as well as in other selected schools but some of them are also observed adequately. The attribute compassion/empathy was also accounted through interviews as well as effectively observed in Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School by the researcher. But some incomprehensive as well as commiserative behaviour were noticed in other selected schools in West Bengal. But the results were quite good in RKM background schools.

CONCLUSION

Sri Sri Vidya Mandir Schools run all over India, which is the educational philosophy of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar under the Art of Living (AoL). This study only tried to provide a verification of various bases of holistic education in the educational setting and helps us to understand how these bases in educational setting might encourage higher trust and better performance for the schools. Every research study is expected to add some content to the field of knowledge, the theory building or practice in educational set ups. The present study also hopes to make its humble contribution in some way. The first and foremost insinuation will be that people from different domains will know about Sri Sri Vidya Mandir School under the aegis of Art of Living (AoL) foundation, the schools which are providing completely free education, food, admirable culture, valuable values and quality holistic education to the underprivileged tribal communities. The study reveals that in our curriculum of secondary schools, there are a very a smaller number of units which brings the message of these bases of holistic education. Therefore, researchers concluded that proper steps should be taken in development of the curriculum so that it can make students more holistic.

REFERENCES

- Carspecken, P.F., & Apple, M. (1992). Critical qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice. In M. L. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds), *The handbook of qualitative research in education*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among five approaches (3rd ed.)*. ISBN: 978-1-4129-9531-3, (pp-83, 84, 85). Sage. New Delhi.
- Miller, R. (1990). *What Are Schools For? Holistic Education in American Culture (third edition)*, (p-201,221). Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press.
- Seva Mandir Projects (Dharavi & Guntur)*. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://docplayer.net/82151488-Seva-mandir-projects-ssrvm-dharavi-mumbai-and-guntur-andhra-pradesh.html>
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.