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A vision for restructuring Tibetan education system in India: A reflective essay

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A vision for restructuring Tibetan education system in India: A reflective essay

Abstract

Chinese aggression of Tibet in 1959 led to about 100,000 Tibetans to flee their country in exile to India. The first priority with the newly formed exile-government was to have separate schools for the Tibetan children. Immediately, in 1960 at Dharmasala, a small town located at the foothill of the Himalayas in Northern India, Tibetan Children's Village School Organization was opened with only 50 students. Today, with the mother school as the headquarters, it has seven sister schools with more than 10,000 children. The school is registered as a non-profit charitable organization for the care of orphans, semi-orphans, and destitute Tibetan children. This was followed by the opening of a number of schools in India, as well as in the neighboring countries Bhutan and Nepal where they have an influx of population in exile. Being in exile, Tibetans have no choice than to adopt the same educational system of the host country.

**A VISION FOR RESTRUCTURING TIBETAN EDUCATION SYSTEM
IN INDIA: A REFLECTIVE ESSAY**

A Research Paper

Presented to

**The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling**

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in Education

by

Karma Thinley Ngodup

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Chinese aggression of Tibet in 1959 led to about 100,000 Tibetans to flee their country in exile to India. The first priority with the newly formed exile-government was to have separate schools for the Tibetan children. Immediately, in 1960 at Dharmasala, a small town located at the foothill of the Himalayas in Northern India, Tibetan Children's Village School Organization was opened with only 50 students. Today, with the mother school as the headquarters, it has seven sister schools with more than 10,000 children. The school is registered as a non-profit charitable organization for the care of orphans, semi-orphans, and destitute Tibetan children. This was followed by the opening of a number of schools in India, as well as in the neighboring countries Bhutan and Nepal where they have an influx of population in exile. Being in exile, Tibetans have no choice than to adopt the same educational system of the host country.

The once all-powerful British Empire has now been eclipsed by the forces of history. Still, its influence as a former colonial power pervades the world in areas of government, science, and education. India is no exception. After remaining under the British regime for 100 years, the British authorities at that time were not in agreement as to how the new educational system should be applied (Laska, 1968). Thus, India had to embrace the British education system, at least the organization structure. The fate of the Tibetan people were brought before this system that was alien to them. In exile for the last 45 years, Tibetans

have brought many changes to the existing system. However, the existing nationalized system restricted us from making many changes in the school system. In 1985, the education department of the exile government reviewed the outcome of this borrowed education system. It was found that 45% of this system does not help us and we live with it because there was no choice. This 45% was based on the school curriculum, teachers' salary, students' age, and dress code (Tibetan Education Annual Report, 1986). This study led to the adoption of autonomous status within the Indian Education System. Since then, our government has been involved in restructuring our education system.

In Tibet, the challenge is simply to survive from day to day. The greatest wish for many Tibetans is for their children to get an education. Without it, they will be trapped in the cycle of subsistence farming. An education is something so prized that many Tibetans would say good-bye to their child, perhaps forever, if he or she only had an opportunity to be educated. I am one such living example. My father waved to me, and I did not know that was the last time he would see me.

Tibetans suffering under the Chinese communist regime are struggling hard to send their children to India for education. Their mission to educate their children took many lives, both by Chinese aggression and trying to escape through the Himalayas to another country such as Nepal. On the other hand, Nepal's foreign policy toward China is an example of modern political appeasement which

resulted in deporting many Tibetans after their escape. Those that make it to Dharmasala, India, are being taken care of by the exiled Tibetan government. Children admitted to my school and adults willing to study were taken care of under the adult education program managed by the same school organization.

The purpose of this school is to look after their physical, mental, and spiritual needs; the school seeks to impart the best of modern education along with a deep and intimate understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of Tibet. This will give them a sense of national identity and hence, enable them to share the hopes and aspirations of the Tibetan people for a free and independent Tibet.

While writing this reflective paper, abundant questions come to my mind. Can I bring a change in the Tibetan educational system? Will people go by my vision of the Tibetan school? In fact, there are more questions than answers. I see that the future of my country lies in education of young Tibetan children coming from Tibet and their ability to return and help those left behind. With this vision and hope, after graduating with my Bachelor of Education degree, I taught in a Tibetan school for five years. That experience seemed more of a religious experience to me than professional. Now what I have learned in the past two years has made the concept of professionalism in education clear.

Coming to America was like a dream to me, yet in a new country, in a new town, and in a new university, was very unsettling. Transition was difficult, especially when few seem to understand what it means to be a visitor in a strange land, in the heart of America. Plus, being from a country where civilization is striving to move from the 17th century to 21st century, it was not an easy life. The purpose of this paper is to describe my feelings about education and the role of the administrator in America and how it would help me to help my professional interests when I return to Tibetan Children's Village School.

My Vision of a Good School

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the varieties

And realities of your excellence:

 The bliss of growth,

 The glory of action,

 The splendor of beauty.

For yesterday is already a dream,

And tomorrow is only a vision;

But today, well-planned, makes every

Yesterday a dream of happiness,

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well therefore to this day!

Such is the salutation of the dawn.

-- Sanskrit Verse

Dreams come to us in the day as well as night. I am particularly a day dreamer. Day dreams are occasions for me to take a journey forward, toward what might be, what can be. I call them personal visions. In our schools, the deliberate attempt to dream and construct visions is conspicuously missing. Maybe we are showered with visions from above, and we think that it is beyond us to have a vision. "Ours is to follow and theirs is to lead..." seems to be our motto. I cannot get over the fact that outsiders come and lecture to school people on how important it is and how important are the teachers. This is too common in my school. Having done their days work they leave all our personal visions blunted by the brilliance of the lecture. How easy it is for the outsiders to say that the school should do this and the school should do that, yet they seldom listen to what educators have to say. Over time, through exhaustion and compliance of well-meaning expectations of others, our personal visions become blurred and we become extremely practical people, doing what is expected of us and "not rocking the boat." In other words, relying on prescriptions of others--not soul searching why you have become what you have become--an educated person.

There is a need to restore, to uncover, and to honor the personal visions of educators because our personal visions have a powerful influence on the educational practices and have the chance of being sustained. Teachers and principals who convey their knowledge and their visions to others derive enormous personal satisfaction and recognition. Despite the rhetoric about the importance of teachers and principals, few educators feel valued or recognized for their work. This is mainly because our personal visions have become tainted and we have become dependent on others for visions.

I have been struggling over the last two years of my teaching career in India to clarify and articulate my own vision of a good school. It took time to develop. Bits and pieces came to me while working in the organization in various capacities and most profoundly from my classroom experiences and studies. A good school for me is neither to build in huge building blocks nor it is not to spread over vast campus. As good schools are raised in the corn fields of Iowa and other hubs of communities, these do not necessarily have to be around the big cities of New York and San Francisco. A good school comes out of good teachers, a good community, and good leaders. A good school for me is a place where everyone is teaching and everyone is learning simultaneously. Students are teaching and learning; principals are teaching and learning; teachers are teaching and learning. Everything that goes on in the school contributes to this end.

Schools need not merely be a place where there are big people who are the learned and little people who are the learners. When teachers, principals, and students are learning, then it becomes more important to the development of a community of learners than what they are learning. A major responsibility of adults in a community of learners is to actively engage in their own learning, to make their learning visible to youngsters, and to other adults alike, to enjoy and celebrate this learning, and to sustain it over time.

Values and Beliefs

One of my primary values is the importance of education itself. I believe that education in general is as important as other basic necessities to sustain life. And for the Tibetans, it is also a medium through which we cannot only preserve our rich cultural heritage, but to regain our country. It also keeps us abreast with the technological advancement throughout the world.

The Primary Responsibility of the Teachers

I believe as teachers our primary responsibility is not so much to teach the various subjects, or to conduct tests to see how much students have learned, or to discipline them in a certain accepted way, but to nurse and nurture the children's sense of confidence and their natural curiosity. Human beings are built to learn. It is the capacity and ability to learn, to explore, to question, to reflect, to reason, that places human beings above all other creatures on this earth. This fundamental

and perennial quality is best manifested in children. As a teacher, I have the chance to closely observe the growth and expansion of children in our school, and since younger ones are growing, I have the opportunity to observe at close range the flowering of a human being without too much adult intrusion.

During my ten years of teaching, certain powerful qualities of children never cease to amaze me: the buoyant energy, the boundless zeal, the searching curiosity, and the self assurance and sheer confidence that they display while exploring the world around them, seeking meaning in each observation that they come into contact with. Observing children enhances one's understanding of learning and what is truly of importance that we must nurse and protect in children. Children are aware of what is happening around them, yet they are not always thinking about what is happening. Awareness and thought are different as awareness and reasoning are different (Hermin, 1994). Awareness, thought, and reasoning may need intelligence or may not need intelligence, but one thing is very clear: learning never stops. It is very natural for human beings to learn. For children, learning is as natural as breathing is to us. But, stagnation of learning and stunting of growth do occur and we see this too frequently in our schools. More often than not, we put the blame on children and say they are not interested any more. Somewhere along the line we adults unknowingly or with good intentions, eliminate these beautiful qualities in children. We deform their boundless energy

and make them into passive creatures capable of acting only under direction and guidance. They tend to become waiters for the teacher's orders, unable to take initiative on their own. Over time, we condition our children to such an extent by adult dictates and intervention that slowly they take leave of their own internal urges and thirst for knowledge and become obedient, mindless creatures passively going through the motions of what we call "education."

As educators, it is not our duty to condition children, but be akin to a gardener--water, prune, and weed so that the flowers will bloom. The actual blooming has to be done by the flower. The gardener can only facilitate the growth of the flower. In the same way, the actual growth and expansion towards a good human being has to be done by the child. The teacher can only guide and facilitate this growth through instruction, influence, and example. Therefore, the child's natural curiosity to learn must never be dampened; his/her confidence, the feeling that he/she can do, must not be snuffed out; the natural urge to question and explore must be given space and due importance.

When we seek true learning, there is always a powerful element of joy. Learning cannot be forced or a burden. Ultimately, if a child is to flower into a good human being with a mind of their own, to contribute to society, then their sense of confidence and natural curiosity to learn with delight must be kindled and stoked at all times. This is our primary responsibility as teachers and educators.

The Role of a Principal

When you are being innovative, you're never quite sure of your end result, simply because what you are doing has never been done before. It's like setting out on a trip and not being sure where you are going to go, but hoping that you'll end up in the right place.

(Havelock, 1978, p. 66)

Never in my life have I seen a role of a principal so closely as last semester when I had to work with the high school principal, Victoria Robinson, at Price Lab School. The principal to me holds the master key of the whole school building. No matter what his/her style of leadership and management, the principal must be the main person in terms of accountability and direction for the total school. He/she enforces the policies of a board, the mandates of the superintendent, the demands of the teacher union, and the wishes of the community. He/she holds the key position that his/her little movement will change the whole scenario of the school externally and internally. No matter what important thing the school plans, when it comes to the implementation, it is the principal who makes it happen. In the principal there is a vision, a vision that seems to distinguish leaders from those who are simply good managers, the vision to create goals, then communicate and commitment to work for it. Thus, we see the principal as the key person with the expertise to administer the changes in the school. They spend their time

motivating people, and giving time to change the system for better ways of solving problems. As a change agent, they know the process of change, the resources relevant to various change efforts, and have direct interaction with the people who are involved in this change. Most of the time, most people do not want change; they want to keep things the way they are, even when outsiders know that change is required. For that reason some change agents are needed just to overcome this pressure, at least, and then to prod and find out the effect. In education today this role is often taken by students, concerned parents, or school board members. They do not necessarily have the answers, but they are dissatisfied with things the way they are, so to bring change, they go for one person, the principal, to bring change. The principal, upon first assuming the office, considers the community expectations and the institutional context as main conditions. Whenever a new principal is asked for, change is expected out of him/her. As a change agent, the principal must be aware of the programs, its positive and negative effects on students, knowing which program can be changed and which cannot, and being involved in changing programs and influencing others to do so.

The Need for the Restructuring Tibetan Education System

I believe that there is a strong need for change in the Tibetan Educational System. In over 35 years of existence in exile, we have successfully overcome the hardships of life in exile and have skillfully adapted to the environment of the host

countries. Being in exile, we have always seen that there is no other choice than to follow India's education system known for its centralization of the whole school process. Although the government of India has done a wonderful job as a neighbor to educate our children and to preserve our culture, her interference in our school system has become more obvious than ever before: staff salaries are being controlled, curriculum decisions have often been altered, and above all, Hindi has become a required subject in the schools.

The success story of the socio-economic development of Tibetans have enjoyed special place among the refugees, and are able to form a government to ensure the future of younger generations. So when the Tibetan schools were first established, the basic underlying aim was to provide modern education along with the deep and intimate understanding of our cultural heritage, national identity, and enable us to share the hopes and aspiration of the Tibetan people to return to a free and independent Tibet. Yet in reality, the Tibetan schools have by necessity followed the curricula of their host country. In exile, Tibetan schools did a wonderful job in educating the Tibetan masses. However, with the passage of time, we are now at the stage where we need to restructure our school system because our school organization has become so unique. With this attitude, I feel that there is a greater importance in creating awareness among the people to get ready for the change which people seldom like. Besides, there has been limited

research on the Tibetan education system that could convince people that there is a need for change.

The question still remains whether we need change or not. To answer this question, let me start with a present world scenario. We all know that our world is divided into things called the "developing" countries, the "developed" countries, the "industrialized" countries, the "rich north," and "poor south," etc. What most people are not sure, is why these countries are divided as such. What do these terms really imply? Are these things permanent features of the state of things in our world?

These are the vital questions of national importance which every country is trying to resolve. We know that these days, the might of a nation or a community or people is judged, not by its military strength, but by its industrial production and commercial trades. Evidence is all around: our host nation, India, is scrambling to catch up with tiny Singapore after decades of industrial stagnancy. The Communist Chinese parties are falling over each other trying to out-trade the other in the rapidly industrializing new China; and even the mighty country of the United States has to borrow from its tiny, but productively more efficient partners, Japan and Korea. And yet, it is sad to note that our own community is sitting idly by. Do we want our community and future of Tibet to be like Singapore and Korea where society is much more technically productive or do we want to be a land of

clerks, bureaucrats, semi-petty business people always relying on someone else for handouts to do our work? The answer lies in our educational approach.

The common factor binding all these rapidly developing countries is their industrial strength. For a nation or a community to achieve this strength, the first thing is to have a reliable education system. Until now Tibetans are so absorbed in the educational system of the host country where the values, mission, vision, curriculums and instruction are prepared to serve an India(n) community. For the last 36 years, what have the Tibetans produced? What educational standards do we have? Being able to speak in English? Passing school tests? Get some job? The fact is that we are yet to produce a single electrician who can competently perform a simple house-wiring task. And after thirty-five years of education, the majority of our youth are still on the streets in the cities and towns, doing a job for minimum wage.

Unless and until we can educate the majority, and this does not simply mean being able to read and write, but being technically educated like students in the United States, our community has no chance of becoming a Singapore or a Korea. In Japan and Korea, over 60% of the school students choose technical education for their further studies. In Europe, over half of its students are technical students. These countries have one thing in common: a good and effective education system, a system backed by technology. But the same

questions are haunting me again and again. How? This one word question brought me to the United States of America, especially to this university where education is believed to be the future. I am at the crossroads of Tibetan education asking similar questions as a war hero in the Chinese democratic movement of the 1930s. "Is it a matter of the hero urging the people to Follow me into the future or of a request to Tell me where the crowd is going, for I am their leader?" (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 1983, p. 10).

How Will my Two Year Educational Experience Help my Community?

I believe that my two years of study in the American education system is the most memorable experience of my life and will go a long way in my contribution to reshaping and restructuring the Tibetan Education System. Being an international student, it took me more time and effort to understand the American education system in the last three semesters. However, after taking various courses in education, visiting a number of schools within and outside the United States, and finally taking a practicum experience at the Price Lab School, I am now aware of what I need to contribute to reshaping the Tibetan Educational System.

The first thing in the American educational system which foreigners admire is the system itself. The United States has no national system of education. Education is a function of each individual state. The Constitution of the United

States, interestingly, is silent about the provision for the establishment and maintenance of schools. This does not mean that the federal government has no concern for the education of children and youth. To the contrary, it has been a supporter of formal education by granting lands for the support of schools, has underwritten special education programs, has legislated grants for the improvement of teaching, and research projects. Although education in the United State is conceived as a function of states, almost all the states have delegated authority to local school districts. As far as curriculum is concerned, there is no one set of well-defined national curriculum. The conceptions of curriculum vary in design from an organized set of objectives to a complicated arrangement of objectives, content, activities, and instructional materials; they vary in scope from a single subject to all subjects from kindergarten through grade 12 (Guthrie et al., 1986).

School Organization

But how would it be to have such a system in the host country like India? How can an education system designed for such a populated country as India be a fit for a country like Tibet? How would I have a system that is a Tibetan system? For example, in 1985, we adopted what is called a Japanese education model of primary learning through the mother tongue (Ignas & Corsini, 1981) and it affected many students who became the victim of this experiment. These students

neither knew Tibetan language nor could they communicate well in English. Therefore, the master string of restructuring lies in the organization, and the first thing to change is to get out of the existing education system and become an autonomous school organization. This would mean that the Tibetan school organization will have the power to adopt the system of its own while maintaining its relation with the central government of India. Many missionary schools and convent schools enjoy this status. Tibetan schools scattered in different part of the world ask for the self-determination of the school system, like Convent School Organizations. The Convent School Organization administers their schools around the world from Britain. As such, we must ask for an Autonomous School status under which we could centralize our own school system.

At this stage of our history, education for all purposes must adhere to the centralization of all schools. Nevertheless, our centralization would be different in justification, operation, and concept from that in India and France. The centralization by Tibetan standard means to let the Tibetan schools function locally by themselves, yet these schools will be affiliated to the council for Tibetan education under the government in exile. Tibetan language and history must be a main course requirement for graduation. Present board examinations need to be replaced by the Tibetan Culture and History Board Examination. Textbooks for these courses would be prepared by the Center for Tibetan Printing Press in India.

Teachers for these courses would be sent by the Center of Higher Tibetan Studies in the holy city of Benaras in central India. All other courses should be decentralized as in the United States. The local schools in the respective countries would decide their curriculum, textbooks, staff selection, and salaries as in the United States. This means to have an open curriculum system to encourage different methods of instruction.

Evaluation System

"Any lasting change in a school will occur only because the staff itself changes norms of expectations, appropriate role definitions, standards of accountability, and patterns of behavior" (Hughes, 1987, p. 45). In the world of education, evaluation is necessary: the public would like to know how good a return it is getting on its money; the organization wants to know how well each of their schools are being run, and the principal wishes to distinguish accurately between his/her strong and weak staff. The whole notion of accountability is central to this concept. Therefore, it is impossible to build an educational program without it. Yet, evaluations in Tibetan schools do not help students and staff effectively as it should have been. Comparing evaluation of schools in the United States with the Tibetan schools in India, there are mainly three reasons why evaluations in Tibetan schools are not effective:

(1) Lack of evaluation skills. Although evaluation is offered as a part of the course in teachers' training, most of the courses are old, outdated, and based on evaluating a large population. For example, feedback is the key to success in evaluation, yet it is impossible to evaluate and write comments for a class of 50 or more.

(2) Indifferent attitude towards evaluation. Teachers see evaluation as power rather than responsibility. Students see evaluation as an authority rather than tools to help their learning. This indifferent attitude towards evaluation from both sides widens the gap between teacher and students for achieving their goals--teaching and learning.

(3) Lack of technology in evaluation. An evaluation of the National Board Examination similar to National Standard Test here, is only taken at the end of the fifth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades. It takes three months to prepare the results. So high school students after graduation were offered provisional certificates to get admission into college, but if the results were not satisfactory, their admission was denied. On the other hand, when tenth grade students completed their examinations, they get a three month break and will have only 110 days of school for the next grade.

Whether teachers are in the East or in the West, at least they are common in looking at evaluation as determining significance. Staff evaluation in education

means determining whether a staff is effective or not. Thus, some teachers are more comfortable in improving their skills through video taping their class but such equipment is not available in most Tibetan schools. Those having such facilities are not aware of such a method. I was really encouraged by this method when we practiced it in my "Supervision and Evaluation" class.

To overcome the evaluation problems in Tibetan schools, the following steps should be implemented. First, the change in the organization and improvement in the educational technology will bring change in the evaluation system. Second, learning the process of documentation in evaluation will make evaluation a professional requirement rather than the habit of assumption. As my class in "Supervision and Evaluation" has taught me, "as long as it's not on paper, it has never happened, and as long as you don't write it down, it never existed." Third, communicating the purpose, criteria, and the process of staff evaluation to the staff reduces the misunderstanding between the evaluator and the person being evaluated. It should be considered as an instrument to help students and staff to improve. Fourth, the concept of "ownership" is never given due importance in my school, and are rather ignorant about what it means to the staff members. So creating a sense of ownership will encourage staff members to be a part of the evaluation and not the victim of the process. Fifth, a teacher specializing in the subject reduces the mistake they often make in poor judgment. These steps will

reduce the defensiveness from teachers regarding evaluation and will set a plan for improvement. And finally, staff evaluation needs to be reviewed and assessed regularly to improve and meet the needs of the people involved.

Many nations in the past, while prescribing rigid institutional standards and controls of the academic evaluation, have at least established institutionalized responsibility for academic quality (Yee, 1995). Similarly, the Tibetan schools have a rigid examination and evaluation system and thus, their academic achievements lay with the institutions and not with teachers and students. The system does not encourage teachers and students to be involved in improving the overall standard of the school. Therefore, the new system set by the Autonomous Tibetan School Organization (ATSO) will empower teachers and students in improving standards under a national evaluation system. A sample of the system would look like this:

Three Terms Test System

- The 210 day school year will have to be divided into three terms.
- All markings will be numerical.
- First and Second term will be of 25 marks each for each course, and 50 marks for the final to make it out of 100%.
- The duration of time for each test will be three hours and extra time will be granted for disabled students.

- The test schedules for all courses must be within a week.
- At least 30% of the questions should be essay type.
- Essay type questions as defined by the ATSO:
 - Nursery from Kindergarten to 5: 30-50 words
 - Junior/Middle School: 60-150 words
 - Secondary/High School: 200-400 words.

Classroom Instruction

In exile the Tibetan schools have, by necessity, followed the curricula of their host country, and adopted English, Hindi, or Nepali as the medium of instruction. In high school classes, Tibetan culture and history are set aside to concentrate upon courses which are required for the standardized Indian (India) examinations and further study. Thus, throughout their primary and secondary education, children are not only influenced by the environmental factors of living in a country which is not their own.

Instruction is the most important thing in the school. All that we do in school is done to support instruction. Any new programs that we implement, purchases we make, disciplinary actions, and field trips students take, are all done in the interest of improving instruction. However, many Tibetan schools are taught in a traditional method where classes are more lecture and fewer activities. Rote learning is typical, where the students do not have ample freedom to express

their views as Bossert's "high-resolution classrooms" (Johnston, 1992). Methods of instruction can be better defined by the phrase as: "chalk and talk," "bell to bell lecture," and "rot's and robots." There is a strong, strong need for a staff development workshop. Teachers with good instructional ability do not just happen. The school administrators need to set a firm foundation so that teachers can teach and students can learn. Teaching should be based on sound knowledge of instructional research and careful study. It must begin with the vision of where you are now and where you want to go. Teachers should apply good planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling techniques to ensure optimum effectiveness of the organization. They must be skillful in diagnosing educational programs, develop curriculum, and develop good instructional methods for children.

The schools in the United States are not restricted to the rigid curriculum and instruction. Instead, teachers have the freedom to design and follow instruction that reflects their visions and beliefs of education, as well as the needs of students (Freiberg & Driscoll, 1996). With the similar visions and beliefs, I will work on improving classroom instruction that will help our children learn best.

Special Education (Marginalized Students)

What does Winston Churchill, Pablo Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci, and Thomas Edison all have in common? Apart from being famous, they all had

"learning disorders" in school. A few days ago, a group in my curriculum class presented a topic on "Full Inclusion." During the discussion, everyone came up with a wide range of definitions of the term "learning disorder," but one consistent point worth noting is that children with learning disorders are often erroneously labeled as being lazy or unmotivated. Thus, within the precarious platform of school education in which a child must succeed in academics or be labeled a failure, there are cracks where a lot of children slip, and thereby they are marginalized for life. They are the most vulnerable, and today there is no viable and respectable alternative education for them. There are students who are on the margins of normal school life due to the learning problems they face. In our case, the primary reason for having children with learning disorders is the loss of lives of many Tibetans under Chinese suppression. Among these Tibetans, were the parents of these children; now orphans, destitute, and under severe financial strain. Furthermore, the mental deficiency or physical problems have added to this group of marginalized students and they comprise a large population in Tibetan schools.

In the last couple of years, Tibetan schools have phased out the average ability grouping system that we had been practicing for over a decade with the hope that the loss of self-esteem, which was the main criticism against the old system, will be restored. How much self-esteem and self-confidence the marginalized students have gained since then is hard to say. But one thing is very

clear. The marginal students need our help the most. Unless we do something about them, they are facing an up-hill task in a mixed ability group that is now in practice. For various reasons the marginal students are shy, withdrawn and rarely speak for themselves. With 30 or more students in each class, the teacher is in no position to give the amount of special help and attention they so badly need and deserve. If our help is for the needy, they are not getting it. The question is how to provide this help without the marginal students losing their self-esteem and self-confidence.

During my second semester, I was trying to find out what the West is doing with such students. Although similar reasons for the problem are limited in numbers, the overall strategy for such learning disorders is either included in "at risk students" or "mainstreaming." I was impressed by this method where marginal students join the mainstream of students, in the form of a mixed ability grouping. They may have some activities together with their class and attend special classes in the subjects where they need extra help.

Some schools went a little further with the idea of mainstreaming and added "inclusion." Inclusion goes far beyond the mere placement of special education students in regular classrooms. In fact, successful education requires nothing less than rethinking methods of service delivery, organizing special education resources, including time and staff and restructuring the curriculum;

instructional methods and assessment procedures to accommodate students with different needs (Autin, 1992). By doing this, they include the marginal child in all the activities of his/her class and at the same time provide the special help for the marginal child.

Whenever we think in terms of how, we tend to look for formulas, methods or a set of rules. In a way we cannot help thinking this way because we have been trained, accustomed, and educated in the same manner. We tend to look for a ready made answer which may have worked in certain situations with certain people. But that does not mean it has a universal application. One thing we must understand is that there are neither a bag of tricks nor magic about this. The solution to the problem still depends largely on the teacher's initiative, creativity, and genuine concern for the student to succeed, without hurting the child's ego and self-respect. And we already have the best tool within our culture, "compassion." Even in our day to day life, we look for some imported goods and the advertisers will not forget to mention the label "imported" at the side of their product. Are all imported goods better? And especially how could some other people have all the answers when the problem is ours? The best solutions come when the problem and the needs are best understood and respected. Who can do it better than the ones who have to or would have to live with it? Our problems and needs are different as we all are different from each other. The solutions, therefore, ought to be based on the uniqueness of the situation. My class discussion on the

"mainstreaming," and later "full inclusion," helped me to prepare these strategies that will help us to take our unfortunate ones towards the fortunate one.

Peer Coaching

An academically able child helping a marginal child in the same class to learn. It is a popular method for the following reasons:

1. Peer influence is one of the strongest influences that governs student behavior;
2. The peer's learning level is more at par with the marginal child than the teacher's which make learning easier;
3. A teacher with 30 or more children in the class is in a difficult position to help all the marginal students at the same time; and
4. The marginal students have less inhibition to learn from a peer than from a teacher.

If the top students need to be challenged, it is more so with the marginal. But the expectations must be realistic to the child's abilities. Too much and too little can both be equally harmful to the child.

Praise and encouragement should be based upon the observation of the student's strength. Timely praise and constant support must blend with the child's strength to build the student.

Many programs fail due to the lack of consent from the people to whom the programs are administered. It is of utmost importance that the teacher gets the cooperation and commitment of the marginal student to whom the help was intended. Just because we have a good intention to help the child, it does not mean it will be automatically accepted by the child, even if it is for his/her own good.

Teacher's Positive Attitude

The self-fulfilling prophecy seems to come true especially to the marginal students. If the teacher has a negative attitude towards the child's ability to succeed, the child most probably will fail. Consciously or unconsciously, the teachers' expectations of the child drops and with that the child's chance to succeed in life is unlikely. Unlike in the East, in the West there is a trend which believes that every child can learn, provided you push the right lever. One of the best levers is the teacher's positive attitude towards the child's ability to learn and succeed in life.

Whatever I have mentioned here is not a solution to all the learning disorders, but an attempt to understand the problems from all sides. We cannot and must not make a carbon copy application of the West, as such a practice has more stories of failures than successes. Each child is unique. Their needs are different. Therefore, the solution to their problem must be different to match the uniqueness of the situation to the child. And when we think in terms of a viable

program to help a child, nothing can match the teacher's sincerity and willingness to help a child learn.

Conclusion

My country, Tibet, is passing through the most crucial period of 2000 years of its history. In 45 years of existence in new alien educational system, the Tibetan Education Department has not only expanded physically but also made valuable contribution in the fulfillment of our educational objectives. Today, we are at the stage where we feel the need of restructuring our educational system when global education is undergoing vast change. Now we are at the position where we feel and realize the existing system, borrowed from the British and later from India, is not sufficient to challenge the children of other countries. Thus, there is a greater need for a flexible education system that will serve the complex needs of the Tibetan children. So when we think of a flexible educational system around the world, the American educational system is the most desired, yet the most successful educational system in the world. However, not denying the fact that there are many elements in the existing system of India that ensure the preservation of our rich cultural heritage. It is these elements and values of education that may make this researcher to follow the business style of "pick up the good ones." All these studies will go a long way in revolutionizing the existing Tibetan educational system towards achieving our national goal: Free Tibet.

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