Vivekananda Teacher Training and Research Centre – VTTRC (A unit of Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement) Site Visit Report

When: February 2013
Who Visited: Aditya Kappagantula, ASHA San Diego Volunteer

VTTRC provides Diploma in Education (D. Ed), a two-year course. The students are trained to be able to teach students in Lower Primary and Higher Primary schools.

During the last week of February I visited Sargur (~80Km from Mysore City) and Hosahalli (~20Km from Sargur), a remote tribal colony located on the outskirts of Bandipur National forest in Karnataka, India. The primary purpose of the visit was to conduct a site visit, review the project/s (VTTRC) funded by ASAH San Diego and compose a report of the visit. I met Mr. Mahesh, Principal/Head of VTTRC, Ms. Malathi, Head of SVYM, Mr. Balasubramanyam, CEO of SVYM, Mr. Praveen Kumar, Head of Mobile Science Lab Project, Teaching staff and around 20 students at VTTRC. I spent most of the time at the VTTRC campus interacting with the students and teaching staff members but I was also given a nice tour of other projects CBSC School, Tribal School, Mobile Science lab. It was an extremely nice experience to directly meet and interact with the students and the staff @ SVYM.

Until 2011 ASHA San Diego was funding ~$3000 to VTTRC. Starting 2012 VTTRC requested for a total of ~$6000. One of the important aspects of this visit is to review and understand the increase in the funding budget/request for this project. Increase in tuition, maintenance costs (hostel, food, transportation) etc., are some of the factors provided as reasons for the increase in budget.

A large portion of the tuition is covered by the Gov. funds and Student contributions. Funds from ASHA are mostly utilized to provide for components like Education materials, special sessions (workshops), personality development programs, exposure visits and extra curricular training programs (like Spoken English). More details on actual numbers are included on the proposal document.

Student responses/feedback of the program:
- Improved communication skills.
- Attention to detail. They learnt how to go into details and compose information from the programs they participated in.
- They get respect from the community
- They liked the opportunity to participate in Value Integrated Teacher and Learning (VITAL) – to discuss strategies to integrate values into the regular

classroom environment without having a separate syllabus. Teachers from all educational institutions and projects of SVYM participated in the workshop.
- They want to go back and help increase education in their communities

Requests from VTTRC:
- ASHA supports only Tribal students at this point, they are requesting us to support economically backward students in general
- Need funding to establish a teacher learning resource center. A central resource center that can utilized by all neighboring communities
- Increase in expenses (maintenance, transport etc.) may need additional funding from ASHA

Challenges:
- Spoken English skills for both teaching staff and students. This is a factor in the post D-Ed unemployment rate.
- Expenses (salaries, infrastructure, maintenance etc.,) continue to increase but the head count of students joining the D-Ed program is reducing. As a result funding from student fees and govt. funding goes down.
- Employability – on an average 16% of the D-Ed graduates are unemployed.

My 2 cents (suggestions I offered to VTTRC Staff):
- Spoken English – both teaching staff and students
  - Curriculum can be taught in the Kannada medium but it would be good if teaching staff would interact with students in English whenever possible. Regular interactions can be in English while the curriculum can be imparted in the D-Ed prescribed medium.
  - If required arrange for English coaching classes for teaching staff with the help of resources from the nearby CBSC school and Tribal school.
- How to increase employability
  - Though Gov. of Karnataka announced to recruit gov. teachers (this year or next year) it is not a yearly ongoing process. It is important for D-Ed graduates to explore other avenues for employment. It may be useful to consider adding extra programs like additional computer operation skills, English speaking abilities, additional science and/or arts in addition to the regular gov. prescribed curriculum to make the students more employable.
- Lack of time – D-Ed curriculum is intensive as a result there is often very less time for extra curricular activities (English coaching, workshops, personality development, computer skills etc.,)
  - If the prospects of employment based on the D-Ed curriculum alone are not very impressive it may be useful to explore the option of reducing the stress on prescribed curriculum (put enough to get the

students to Graduate) and increase the emphasis/time on parameters that make the students more employable.

- More coordination and resource utilization between different SVYM projects. For example:
  - If possible arrange for guest lectures using Science, Computers, English teaching staff from the CBSC school and/or tribal school.
  - Take students from VTTRC to participate in the mobile science lab project on a rotation basis
- Explore possibility to include sessions on Science of morality.

My Conclusion:

Kids in general seemed to be motivated to participate in this program and find that this program is making a positive impact in their lives, which they intend to spread in their communities.

It is encouraging and inspiring to hear stories of...
- A student who is a married with 2 kids walks ~10Km daily to attend VTTRC
- Kids from the tribal school (another SVYM project) join VTTRC and join back the tribal school as teacher after graduating from the D-Ed program

I believe ASHA funds are playing a key role in helping the kids to walk in the right direction. It may be a good idea to consider making economic backwardness a key parameter in our funding along with the tribal origins. SVYM (& its VTTRC) are certainly making a positive impact to this community.