

Principles and Practices of Caring Communities:
Women's Participation in the Public Spheres of Education in Contemporary India
Proposal Submitted by Susan F. Carson, Ph.D.
2010-2011 Project Statement
Award #0481

Proposal

As an educator devoted to furthering equitable practices within my field, I see the project of Principles and Practices of Caring Communities as vital to the trajectory and sustainability of women's contribution to Indian society. The University of Lucknow Department of Education in Lucknow, India has invited me to research equity issues in education particularly those in relation to opportunities for women in contemporary India. The objective is to research the multifaceted and interconnected factors that influence the sustainability of caring communities within a diverse context while providing attention to the impact of gender. The research is designed to be inclusive with a particular emphasis on the principles and practices that women identify within educational settings. Women's participation rates in education have direct impact on society's potential for economic growth and also for the quality of life for women and their families. It is necessary to examine principles and practices of caring communities to better understand educational equity. This examination must be paired with an analysis of the social factors and structural elements of education, which facilitate and/or inhibit women's participation. Better understanding of caring communities and women's participation rates has the potential to significantly impact development in educational opportunities.

Complementing Principles and Practices of Caring Communities is ongoing collaborative work in the United States with Grand Valley State University and Coit Creative Arts Academy in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Pine Island Elementary School in Comstock Park, Michigan. Through a program instructing university level courses in the setting of urban impoverished public schools much has been revealed about the identification of principles and practices of caring communities. This research will include other site possibilities; the locations for research will remain open. For example, initial contact has been made with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan where issues of equity and care for women have been identified as areas of increasing concern. The varied contexts of study promote comprehensive understandings of principles and practices of caring communities and the exposure of trends, which transcend geographic variations.

Dr. Tripta Trivedi, a 2009- 2010 Fulbright scholar from the University of Lucknow, Department of Education will be lecturing at California State University in Long Beach. The intention is to collaborate in the United States while she is a visiting lecturer and to extend this collaboration in India with the potential 2010-2011 Fulbright research award. Professor Subodh Kumar from the University of Lucknow, Department of Education has extended offers of support in pursuit of this award and subsequent research. The results of extensive collaboration with scholars in this field of study promote comprehensive understandings that have the potential to speak to global educational communities.

Primary research will be acquired through conducting personal interviews and surveys with professionals possessing expertise relevant fields. Literary works focusing on principles and practices of caring communities with an emphasis on women's roles in educational development and social factors influencing women's participation will be used to supplement field based findings and to connect this project with relevant scholarly theories and academic research. The

balance of primary and secondary research assures that lessons gained through primary data collection will take into consideration the web of knowledge upon which it has its roots.

This research aims to identify principles and practices of caring communities, furthering understanding of cross-continental connections and educational opportunities. There will be an emphasis on the key elements that support equity opportunities for women to participate in these caring communities that promote their educational attainment and participation. The consideration of educational opportunities in conjunction with social and structural realities impacting women's participation, ultimately exposing principles and practices of caring communities, is inherently multi-faceted. One facet is to understand how principles and practices of caring communities might be integrated into educational institutions and education programs to advance women's equity. The study will also create a greater understanding of the relationship these principles and practices have to learning and teaching, again with an emphasis on women's learning. And finally, this research will explore how we empower others to care including all demographics.

Methods of Inquiry

In exploring ways in which principles and practices of caring communities could be integrated into a learning community – i.e., how those principles could be used to construct a shared vision, reduce violence, improve communication, enhance relationships, address issues of gender equity and foster respect - a contrast/comparative perspective grounded in anthropological inquiry and action research methods will be used (Reason, 2001). Both qualitative and quantitative perspectives will be integrated. Care will be taken from the beginning to construct a unified line of inquiry across the three contexts.

Data Collection

Data will be collected from numerous sources in each geographic setting to enhance reliability and include as wide a variety of perspectives as possible. Specifically, the various forms of data collection will include: (a) surveys (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Janesick, 1994), (b) interviews (e.g., formal, informal, in-depth conversational), (c) participant observations, (d) photographs, (e) field notes, and (f) anecdotal records and documents. In addition, surveys will be constructed, collected, and analyzed with indicators of implemented principles and practices such as: (a) equity opportunities for women; (b) development of a climate to address issues of gender, equity, and opportunity; (c) enhanced communication; (d) increased respect and integrity; (e) healing opportunities; and (f) overall increase in job satisfaction to included contentedness in work.

Data Analyses

Within a macro context, data will be analyzed according to steps in a methodology described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Initial categories and concepts will be identified from data trends. Then, as new data are collected and analyzed, these will be continually refined. Data collection and analysis could become a cyclical process, with new information enriching and guiding the focus of the overall research. As categories emerge and grow, larger themes or frameworks will be tested to develop emergent theories; these will continually be tested against new data.

Specifically, the data for each setting will be analyzed for patterns, domains, coding, constructs, and triangulation. Multiple forms of analysis will be used to ensure the reliability and validity of findings (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Woods, 1994; Clifford & Marcus, 1986;

Spradley, 1979, 1980). For example, these could include: (a) document analyses for longitudinal change, (b) analyses of adoption or rejection of principles and practices for community, (c) analyses of participant surveys and achievement variables, and (d) analyses of interview responses for patterns of similarity and difference. The analyses will include coding of categorical data, frequency counts and descriptive themes. Changes noted over time will be considered important across these case studies, so beginning and concluding documents and practices will be given particular attention to assess the degree to which empowering principles and practices of caring communities were identified, adopted or refused.

In addition to this data analysis process, regular debriefing sessions with the participants in each setting will occur throughout the project. While gathering additional information, these sessions will also serve as opportunities to check in during analysis.

Final Report

Upon conclusion of this sabbatical leave, a final report will be submitted illustrating: (a) survey and interview findings across cultural contexts; (b) a deepened understanding of the balance of academic freedom and collegial and professional responsibilities in teaching and endorsing equity particularly for women; (c) informed practices for a college of education to teach our children/selves how to implement caring; (d) future work in academic climate and relationship building for equity enrichment of women; and (e) a guide for educational institutions to build their own principles and practices of caring communities with a prominence for women.

The research will be shared in national venues such as American Educational Research Association and international presentations such as International Education for Peace conferences, as well as working to publish in scholarly journals along the lines of Social Studies Research and Practice. Global and local benefits will also emerge in this research through identification of principals and practices of caring communities in the schools I work in, for example Coit Creative Arts Academy, Pine Island Elementary, Grand Valley State University and Lucknow University. Ultimately I will be using what I learn to better myself as an educator and colleague, thus passing the lessons on to those I work with as well as my students. It is my intent that the work will be proliferating exponentially.

Purpose, Importance and Benefits

With India at a critical juncture in its process of modernization and social change, straddling the worlds of tradition and modernity, it is necessary to examine how the identification and implementation of principals and practices of caring communities can sustain and empower women's participation in educational opportunities. These opportunities can be translated into economic and health concerns as well as social concerns to include the state of the elderly, divorce rates, working children, disabled individuals and crimes against women. Educational opportunities increase equality on a local as well as global scale.

The 2000 World Education Forum held in Dakar (Senegal) identified commonly held educational concerns including promotion of free and compulsory primary education, learning and life skills, increasing adult literacy particularly for women and the achievement of gender parity and equality. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative echoes these concerns in their mission statement. "A world where all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming societies where gender equality becomes a reality (2008)." Equity advancement is a global concern affecting all nations.

Institutions have embraced concepts of community by embedding them in mission, vision, and value statements. Earlham College and the University of California Davis have

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cultivated principles and practices of community separate from their mission, vision, and values statements. They have identified principles that guide their respective institutions. There are also multiple opportunities to embed principles and practices of caring communities within established and ongoing initiatives. Within the Constitution of India, 93rd Amendment Bill 2001 provisions are made for free and compulsory education for children ages 6-14. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an initiative of the Central Government to provide free education to children ages 6-14 by year 2010. The Mahila Samakhya Project works for the empowerment of women through education. Educational opportunities in environments that have principles and practices of caring communities at their heart will be self-sustaining in multiplying effects.

Principles and practices must be constructed within the site of their future implementation. It is not a one size fits all. Each institution with their identified range of participation (faculty, staff, administration, student body, alumni, board members) must play a part in the development of the principles and practices of caring communities that they will abide by. While the emphasis in this research is on the social factors of women's participation in caring communities in conjunction with structural elements of education, it can be expanded to embrace other aspects of vulnerable populations in policy development in institutional, business, government, and public settings.

India, Experience and Fit

In the late 1980's I traveled, studied and worked in India and Nepal. When I came back to the United States, I found my country poor in spirit and acceptance. The experiences I encountered in India forged the foundations of my life's endeavors. India has a rich culture grounded in wisdom and tradition, critical aspects of education and caring communities. During my previous travels, the nation offered a strong feeling of acceptance. This was a place free from judgment, which encouraged the importance of being who I was. At the core of this culture I found service. These elements are essential to developing principles and practices of caring communities. The United States has much to learn from India. This cross-cultural exchange will build upon co-learning in a culturally responsive and inclusive fashion. Seeing need and working to accommodate sustainable practices particularly with women and children became my life work.

Co-founding a school in central Florida that was created to be inclusive of bi-racial students I continued to address issues of equity in education. As a single mother teaching and raising a family of 4 girls and one boy in Taos, New Mexico I was able to glean a stronger understanding of working within a tri-cultural community being the minority. Furthering this, I was vice president in charge of community relations of Didi's Incorporated. Didi's was a foundation designed for student exchange between the highlands of Nepal and New Mexico. The cultural intersections were as profound as the differences. Working with the River Foundation in Miami and Los Angeles addressing the needs of babies and too many other young people with HIV, strengthened my ability to counsel. Teaching in Chugiak, Alaska reinforced the importance and value of culture in education. The geography of the region brought another understanding of regional versus urban education. These lessons have been enhanced by continued travel particularly to Belfast, Ireland; Uberaba, Brazil; and the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. My work in Ireland with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education came at the onset of renewed violence between groups of Protestants and Catholics. Uberaba brought unique experiences strongly revealing the economic separation in educational opportunities. I worked with teachers from rural areas designing service-learning models for their communities. At the

University of Cape Coast in Ghana I worked developing cross-cultural university exchange programs.

Collaborative work with the University of Michigan-Flint and with Westwood Heights in Flint, Michigan has seen wonderful successes from increased yearly progress to community involvement in urban revitalization. I have had the opportunity to work with Arun Gandhi and the University of Michigan-Flint in their initial proposals for a peace institute. Currently I am co-founder of a pilot program, teaching Diversity in Education courses within the public schools that address education for homeless and economically challenged young people. The lessons I have learned through these experiences have prepared me to make the most of an opportunity to pursue my research overseas, embracing education's universal heart.

Applying innovative techniques to reach populations has been important in my ongoing educational service. As chair of Grand Valley State University College of Education Faculty a unique balance of administration and practice create numerous opportunities to implement effective change. Professionally, this Fulbright Research Award in Principles and Practices of Caring Communities: Women's Participation in the Public Spheres of Education in Contemporary India will strengthen the body of equity research providing concrete means to address strong need. It will further my work creating an exponential impact upon global gender equity. This honor will be carried with utmost respect and integrity modeling the diplomacy and responsibility that this body of research is promoting.

In sincere appreciation of your consideration,

Susan F. Carson