### Week 8 Forum: Intro to Ethnography

In Project #2, we asked how a high-quality (creative, relevant) and affordable education might be made available to children and adolescents resident in the world’s slums. But the unpleasant fact is that high-quality *opportunities* rarely translate into full *enrollments*. As UNESCO discovered through its program *Education for All*, educational systems can provide free, universal *access* to primary schooling, temporarily increasing school enrollments, sometimes quite dramatically, only to see many children drop out before finishing school. *Why don’t these kids persist? What factors influence whether or not slum-based parents continue to send their children to school?*

Many locate the problem *inside* slum schools. Foreign visitors are especially shocked at the conditions of schools across the developing world, with many lacking the most basic equipment and school supplies—textbooks, blackboards, desks, benches, and sometimes even classrooms. Trained teachers are often unavailable, especially in remote rural areas. Shortages of teachers and school buildings result in double shifts or very large class sizes (upwards of 70 learners). Teachers who are “present” often have weak incentives and little supervision. Consequently, absenteeism and “time off task” run high. Like in India where government teachers are absent 25 percent of days and teaching less than 55 percent of the time.

And these are just the *school*-based problems. Other factors—rooted in family, culture, and community—make the provision of quality, affordable education one of the great human development challenges of the 21st century. Project #3 explores these dynamics through structured observation and interviewing in slum-based schools. The goal is to comprehend the complex set of factors that underlie educational center development in urban poor communities throughout the world.