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Literacy and Dialogue: Educational Design for Homeless Women in Delhi, India

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Thesis Project Proposal

This project proposal outlines a piece of participatory action research to be done in partnership with Delhi House Society and women of Meena Bazaar to develop a culturally accessible method of adult literacy education for homeless women. Educators such as Laubach and Freire have pioneered adult literacy programs that seek to cultivate personal and community transformation in addition to functional literacy. Such predecessors have accomplished valuable work; however, to be effective in India, educational design must be contextualized to the specifics of the community. Through secondary scholarly research, key-informant interviews with homeless women in Delhi, and interviews with local adult educators, this piece of research aims to capture emergent themes regarding educational design theoretically, practically, and content-wise. Interviews with women will seek to identify valuable cultural themes and patterns that can direct the content of literacy education programs for homeless women. As a result of this study, Delhi House Society will be able to engage the identified real world context with identified themes and principles from Christianity and Islam through the venue of literacy education. Research will contribute to the body of knowledge in this field, and will culminate in a five-page booklet of principles for contextual literacy education formation for Delhi House Society to use as they seek community transformation in Meena Bazaar.

**Introduction**

The women who live in Urdu Park in Meena Bazaar are homeless, illiterate and unemployed aside from the begging they do outside of the Jama Masjid mosque. Delhi House Society is beginning literacy education for the women of Meena Bazaar. In addition to the wealth of practical benefits that stem from literacy, such as the ability to navigate the city, avoid getting cheated with official documents, and catch the right bus, studies have linked literacy among women with lower birth rates. Beyond the benefits of literacy as an end to itself, there is a wealth of research that regards adult literacy education as a powerful tool for transformation. Paulo Freire and Frank Laubach’s experiences as adult educators speak to this potential in adult education. Literacy education can be a powerful vehicle for discussion of community and life issues. This study will seek to understand the perspectives and educational experiences of Meena Bazaar’s women to shape an educational design that engages voices both from Islam and Christian texts to cultivate ethical values and transformation among Delhi’s homeless population.

**Literature Review**

Literacy education among the uneducated urban poor has great potential for individual empowerment, as well as for community transformation. Historically, Protestant missionaries have promoted literacy education, especially among the poorest and most marginalized populations. The Protestant principle of “Sola Scriptura” affirms that “one can understand God’s word only by reading the Bible.” (Mantovanelli 2013, p. 2) ) In his study on the long-term relationship between populations’ exposure to Protestant missions and contemporary variances in literacy outcomes across India, Mantovanelli finds that places with a historical missionary presence have a strong a positive association with the total populations’ literacy rate. Increased literacy extends to even those who did not adopt the missionaries’ religion. (2013, p. 3-4) In this way, entire cultures have been transformed. Entire populations have been changed by the voice of Christ communicated through education, even if they do not claim Jesus as their own.

Frank Laubach’s world-renowned literacy training movement, which resulted in the widely-used “Each One Teach One” Program, is informed by compassion and aims to equip students with practical literacy capacity and the transformational message of Christ. Laubach focused on evangelism through literacy education among the Muslims of Dansalan, Philippines. Through respecting their religion and actively seeking to learn the “religion, culture, and language of the Maranao Muslims” out of love for them, Laubach found a favorable environment within which to minister. (Gowing, 1983, p. 60) Literacy education provided valuable training to this largely illiterate Muslim population that had historically been hostile towards outsiders. As Gowing says, for Laubach, “Literacy provided the means not just to approach them but to approach them as one who wanted to share the love of Jesus Christ with them.” (1983, p. 61)

For Laubach, the literacy education methods hinged upon keywords, which contained as many sounds as possible from the target language. These keywords did not necessarily need to mean anything particularly important; they only needed to contain richness of sounds. When developing a keyword curriculum for the Moros of Maranao to learn to read their language, Laubauch wrote that he gathered some locals to help him identify keywords that contained all twelve consonants of the Maranaw language. (Laubach 1960, p. 30) These keywords were developed into charts to assist students as they learned to read.

Before he could teach the people of Maranao, Laubach saw the importance of understanding their language, worldview, and faith. Large bodies of literature espouse the value of contextualized education. For example, Freire’s approach to education provides a helpful theoretical framework for education that is rooted in a community’s cultural context and stirs new consciousnesses to encourage engagement with community transformation. In his native Brazil, Freire launched “culture circles” through adult literacy classes, in which “illiterate adults were invited to participate in a process of critical reflection on the social conditions in which they found themselves.” (Roberts, p. 75). This Freireian adult literacy involved cultural evaluation of the social situation of the illiterate adults and formation of appropriate materials and agendas to match the context. (Roberts, p. 76) The adult participants’ input was central to Freire’s approach: generative words emerged from the community’s own experiences, and teaching was dialogue-based, not lecture. This democratic method of adult literacy education is firmly rooted in community experience, and looks towards individual empowerment and community transformation through the vehicle of education. Such an approach has potential application into other spheres of consciousness transformation such as discipleship.

As Freire’s educational vision was distinctly contextual for Brazil, contextual and cultural issues must be considered when implementing it elsewhere in the world. According to Choules (2007), wholesale adoption of Freire’s “popular education” approach without considering the context of the implementation location can cause significant problems for social change education. (2007, p. 160) While she wrote regarding difficulties translating Freirian critical education from Latin America to countries such as America and Australia, similar contextual adaptations must be considered when pursuing application for critical education approaches in India.

When studying educational design for any population, socio-cultural context is a foremost concern. One’s socio-cultural context shapes worldview, assigns meaning to objects and ideas, and provides each individual with a sense location in the world. Vygotskyian sociocultural theory is based on “the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can best be understood when investigated in their historical development.” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191) As human activities, learning and education also occur in cultural context, and along with knowledge, are inextricably tied with that specific context. (Alfred, 2002) Students have grown and developed within specific cultural worlds, and it is an educator’s role to seek to understand those cultural worlds. They should also seek to understand how students “interpret who they are in relation to others, and how they have learned to process, interpret, and encode their worlds.” (Alfred 2002) Without this understanding, the educational efforts may be nothing but rote memorization, devoid of opportunity for application, and without effect on the heart.

**Variables**

Understanding the women’s sociocultural contexts will be crucial if an accessible, effective educational design is to be discovered. National culture (Indian), religious culture (Muslim), and socio-economic culture (homeless) shape women’s roles, life experiences, and worldviews. Understanding the culture of Meena Bazaar means understanding these women’s location at the intersection of these three cultures. It is this understanding that will be paramount in understanding effective practical strategies for education, and valuable themes to tie in.

This is a tangled web to unravel and operationalize, so interview questions will be strategically designed to evoke responses about their perceived roles, opportunities, and limitations as a woman in society, reasons that they are in favor or opposition of a literacy education program, and the role of God in their lives. The responses to these questions will have been shaped by the influencing three cultural spheres the ladies belong to.

Prior educational attainment does matter, and it would be pertinent to this research to discover what level of education they reached and why they withdrew from education. However, that is not the primary variable this study is concerned with. The primary concern is getting at cultural worldview dynamics, such as the felt roles and limitations of women, and the role of Allah in their lives. Understanding who they view God to be, and how they understand God views them will provide for the creation of a curriculum that empowers the participants as valuable children of God with a purpose in this world.

Independent variables : cultural values, prior educational experience

Dependent variable : contextual and engaging literacy education design

**Research Question**

How can adult literacy educational design be contextualized to facilitate learning and transformational dialogue among homeless women in Delhi?

**Community Relevance**

This research contributes to the current initiatives Delhi House Society is pursuing in the Meena Bazaar Rain Basera. Women from the community have expressed a desire to learn how to read, and Delhi House Society staff has expressed a need for consistent, systematic approaches to education on the site. Part of Delhi House Society’s mission is to see the lives of poor communities “transformed economically, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually, and walking in the fullness of life as purposed by God.” (delhihouse.org) The intentions behind this research are in line with that vision, and it is the researcher’s hope that research outputs will assist Delhi House Society in their mission to do the transformational work of the Kingdom in Meena Bazaar.

**Action-Reflection Theological Framework**

Ideally, the resulting adult literacy program will be an embodiment of a transformational conversation, as one of its goals is to create a space for discussion of real-life concerns and ethical/spiritual responses. Through understanding the realities and roles of the women of Meena Bazaar (city conversation), the researcher will identify appropriate ethical and spiritual themes from Muslim and Christian voices to incorporate in the resulting educational design (theological conversation). Ideally, then Delhi House Society will be able to engage the identified real world context with identified themes and principles from Christianity and Islam through the venue of literacy education. Research will identify themes that should be incorporated, but it is anticipated that they will be within the realm of the love and Fatherhood of God, and how that shapes lifestyle.

**Assumptions or Presuppositions**

In this research, there is the assumption that women want or could use an additional purpose within literacy education. Literacy education is a felt need that has been vocalized by a number of women, though it cannot be assumed that every lady in the community is invested. Realistically, the researcher cannot expect to understand the ladies’ entire cultural framework. However, it is assumed that valuable themes will surface that can be addressed and engaged with wisdom from Holy Scripture. The researcher is also assuming that the women would also be willing to partake in community-based discussion.

**Population and Locations**

Participants in this study will be homeless women between 18 and 55 years of age living in or around the Rain Basera shelters in Delhi. They may be illiterate or semi-literate, as both candidates would be helpful in determining what design and cultural factors contribute to effective education of homeless women. The researcher has an existing relationship with an organization, Delhi House Society, which works in Meena Bazaar and has a good relationship with this community of women. Contact will be made by visits to the community and meetings with eligible research participants there.

**Methods**

Secondary information collection will consist of review of the pertinent scholarly literature. Primary information collection will hinge primarily on observation, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 20-25 women residing in the Rain Basera, and interviews with local experts in adult education. Interviews with local experts will provide information on the practical elements of adult education design, while interviews with the women from the Rain Basera will inform the discussion on cultural elements in adult literacy design.

The researcher will keep field notes on her observations in the current trial literacy classes, and will use an audio recording device (once participant consent is secured) to record participant interviews. A translator appropriately trained in ethical research practices will assist with these interviews. Each interview is anticipated to last for about one hour. A preliminary list of interview questions can be found in Research Tools.

**Validity**

After data collection, the researcher will use methodological triangulation to demonstrate validity “by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives.” (Guidon, Diehl, and McDonald, 2011, p. 1) Analyzing co-existing themes that emerge from the various data collection methods can indicate patterns and re-enforce the truth and accuracy of the study’s findings. (Guidon, Diehl, and McDonald, 2011, p. 1) She will locate pertinent emergent themes from the various data collected, including secondary scholarly research, key informant interviews with community members and adult education experts, and on-site observations at Meena Bazaar.

Data, therefore, will be reflective of a variety of angles on the topic of contextualized literacy education for the homeless. Scholarly literature will engage the academic discussion on contextual literacy education for empowerment, while local educators will speak to practical methods of adult education, and homeless women’s experiences will illuminate the realities of their context.

Each piece contributes to the resulting knowledge: the theoretical, the practical, and the content. Through implementing methodological triangulation from various data sources, the researcher will analyze findings on important cultural elements to be considered when constructing appropriate transformational adult literacy education design.

**Research Guides and Assistants**

All interviews with participants will be conducted in Hindi. While the researcher can speak conversational Hindi, an interpreter will be required to truly communicate and capture everything that is said during the interviews. Shallu Rai, a Hindi interpreter, has agreed to assist with translation. While she has not undergone CITI Program Training for conducting research with human subjects, the researcher will conduct an abbreviated 1-2 hour course with her concerning such topics as privacy, confidentiality, beneficence, justice, and respect of persons.

The researcher’s limited knowledge of Hindi will be sufficient for gauging participants’ compliance, concern, or distress, so she will attentively supervise the interviews to ensure participants’ comfort. Because this research is aiming to collect 20-25 interviews, and each interview will take about 1 hour, Shallu Rai will be compensated appropriately.

**Ethical Considerations**

An important ethical issue to consider in research with human subjects is the issue of risk. The researcher is committed to protecting all participants within the research process in whatever ways are appropriate. No research subjects’ names or identifying information that may put them at risk will be used in the study. All participants will be given aliases, and identifying information will be changed. All interviews will be entirely voluntary, and while reviewing the informed consent document, participants will be notified of their freedom to leave the study without penalty.

Because of the researcher’s relationship with Delhi House Society, and NGO that provides services for the residents of Meena Bazaar and their children, potential participants may assume that they are required to comply in this interview process. The informed consent document will also dispel any illusions that participation might be mandatory and could affect the services they receive. The researcher and translator will ascertain that a participant thoroughly understands that this is voluntary, that they are free to exit the study at any time, and the entirety of the informed consent form.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to minimize risk for trauma of any sort to participants in the study. This study is low risk, and the only potential risk the researcher could imagine would be if the participant had experienced some trauma that resurfaces during the interview. The risk of distress in these interviews is no higher than what could be expected during any conversation about personal experiences and cultural attitudes. If participants do experience such distress, however, there are resources available to them. Mohini Pandey, a counselor affiliated with Delhi House Society, would be willing to provide counseling to any participants who might require this service.

**Permissions**

The researcher received approval from Azusa Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research. The IRB has found this research project to be ethically sound, posing minimal risk to the participants in the community. Within India, the researcher has received approval from Keshav Dutt Pandey, the Team Leader and Executive Director of Delhi House Society to engage in this research. In addition, she received an endorsement from Dr. Shaik Mujibur Rehman, Associate Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia Central University, New Delhi that affirms the culturally sensitive nature of the study’s administration.

**Research Products and Action Outcomes**

This research will be conducted with the intention of ending in action and program implementation. Program implementation may occur at a later date, but this research will leave Delhi House Society with a presentation to the staff in July 2015, as well as a 5-page booklet that outlines principles, cultural themes to integrate, and a variety of methods to do so. It will be intended for use when constructing a literacy education program for the homeless women of this community. It is the researcher’s hope that research will directly benefit the participating population by assisting in the design and implementation of a contextualized literacy education program. The nature and format of this program will hinge upon research findings.

**Community Benefits**

This research is intended to benefit the community directly. Participants will be providing input for the design of a literacy education program in which they will be able to enroll. Benefits will include a body of information for Delhi House Society’s use to create and implement a Hindi literacy program for homeless urban poor. The community will potentially benefit from DHS’s active use of the research to design a literacy education program. This program would be tailored to the context and needs of the community, with the intention of partnering with them in the journey towards literacy and empowerment.

**Timetable**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research Activity | Start Date | End Date | Estimated Hours | Personal Hours |
| Collect Secondary Data | February 2015 | May 2015 | 50 hours |  |
| Receive IRB Approval | April 2015 |  | 20 hours |  |
| Plan Interviews with Key Informants | April 2015 | May 2015 | 5 hours |  |
| Conduct Interviews with Key Informants | May 2015 | June 2015 | 24 hours |  |
| Analyze and synthesize Data into Thesis Project | June 2015 | July 2015 | 200 hours |  |
| Community Report-back to Delhi House Society | July 2015 |  | 20 hours |  |
| Submission of Final Research | July 27, 2015 |  |  |  |

**Budget**

The following budget is an estimate of expected costs that the researcher may have to cover. These figures are not exact, but provide a general idea of costs that she is prepared to pay.

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| --- | --- |
| **ITEM** | **COST** |
| Professional services: e.g. language coach, transcriber $ 100 | |
| Research: e.g. cybercafé charges, text purchase, duplicating $ 50 | |
| Research assistants (translator-interpreter) $ 70 | |
| Payments to informants $ N/A | |
| Supplies $N/A | |
| Equipment: e.g. digital recorder, camera, laptop, $ 10  Sketchbook | |
| Transportation $ 20 | |
| Housing $ N/A | |
| Thesis Presentation to Community Organization/Church $ 10 | |
| Thesis Publication (formal) How many copies to whom? $ 25 | |
| Photography Maps $ N/A | |
| Mobilization $ N/A | |
| Other $ | |
| TOTAL **$ 285** | |
|  | |

**Textual Resources**

Alfred, M. V. (2002). The promise of Sociocultural Theory in democratizing adult education. In *Learning and sociocultural contexts: Implications for adults, community, and workplace education* (pp. 3-13). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Brown, R. E. (1971). How dialogue can be used to witness to Muslims. *Evangelism and Missions Information Service (EMIS)*. Retrieved from [www.emqonline.com](http://www.emqonline.com).

Choules, K. (2007). Social change education: Context matters. *Adult Education Quarterly, 57(2)*, 159-176. doi: 10.1177/0741713606293912.

Corwin, E. (1980). Bury my heart in the Khasi Hills. *Evangelism and Missions Information Service (EMIS).* Retrieved from www.emqonline.com.

Eaton, R. M. (1974). Sufi folk literature and the sxpansion of Indian Islam. *History of Religions*, *14*(2), 117-127. doi:10.1086/462718.

Freire, P. (2013). *Education for critical consciousness.* Bloomsbury Academic: London.

Gowing, P. G. (1983). The legacy of Frank Charles Laubach. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 58-62. Retrieved from internationalbulletin.org.

Inniger, M. W. (1979). Getting to know their heart hunger is key to reaching Muslims.*Evangelism and Missions Information Service (EMIS)*. Retrieved from [www.emqonline.com](http://www.emqonline.com)

John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist*, *31*(3/4), 191-206. doi:10.1207/s15326985ep3103&4\_4

Laubach, F. C. (1960). *Thirty years with the silent billion: Adventuring in literacy*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell.

Lewis, O. (1966). The culture of poverty. *Scientific American,* 215(4), 19-25.

Mantovanelli, F. (2013). The Protestant legacy: Missions and literacy in India. *Available at SSRN 2413170*.

Natarajan, N. (1977). *The missionary among the Khasis*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.

Roberts, P. (2000). *Education, literacy, and humanization: Exploring the work of Paulo Freire*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Schlitz, M. M., Vieten, C., & Miller, E. M. (2010). Worldview transformation and the development of social consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *17*(7-8), 18-36.

**Appendix 1: Research Tools**

*Recruitment Script:*

“Hello! My name is Emily, and I am studying literacy education in this community. I am asking some ladies in the community a few simple questions about their experiences with education and attitudes about education for women in India to determine what kind of literacy education format would best fit with this community. Your responses would be private and confidential. Would you mind if I asked you some questions?”

*Interview Questions*

1.How old are you?

2. Are you married? How long have you been married? What work does your husband do?

3. Do you have any children? How old are they?   
4. Where are you from? What brought you to Delhi? To Meena Bazaar?

5. Did you attend school? How many years did you go to school for?

6. What do you think about your community?

7. What do people think about education for boys and for girls?

8. How do you worship Allah? What does Allah think about you?

9. Would you want to participate in literacy education? Why or why not?

10. If you had a daughter who was 15 years old, what three things would you tell her to guide her in life?

11. What does it mean to be a woman here?

**Appendix 2: University Institutional Review Board Approval**

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| apuLogo | **Azusa Pacific University**  ***Institutional Review Board*** | Office of Research and Grants  PO Box 7000  Azusa, CA 91702  Tel: 626.815.2036  Fax: 626.815.2087 |

**DATE: April 28, 2015**

**TO: Emily Echevarria**

**FROM: Lewis Bonney, Ph.D., Chair, Institutional Review Board**

**IRB ID NUMBER: #35-15**

**PROJECT TITLE: Literacy and Discipleship: Educational Design for Homeless Women in Delhi, India**

**Azusa Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your research proposal by Full Board Review for the period of April 28, 2015 through April 27, 2016.**

**Researcher’s Responsibilities:**

1. For those whose research involves surveying any portion of the APU population, contact should be made with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) for scheduling.
2. Submit a Request for Revisions or Additions if you intend to alter your research protocol in any way (see the Institutional Review Board Handbook, p. 56)
3. All protocol deviations, unanticipated or serious adverse events, must be reported to the IRB within one week. (see the Institutional Review Board Handbook, p. 19)
4. Submit a yearly Request for Renewal of Continuing Research form (IRB handbook, p. 54) or a Closure of Research Report form (IRB Handbook, p.58) prior to the anniversary of the date of most recent approval by the IRB.

**Disclaimer The Institutional Review Board at Azusa Pacific University is charged with oversight of protection of human subjects in experimental research. Receiving IRB approval does not constitute institutional approval of the project by Azusa Pacific University. If the responsible investigator believes that the project might be inconsistent with the mission and values of Azusa Pacific University or potentially not represent Azusa Pacific University in a favorable light, it is recommended that the responsible investigator contact the dean in your School or College at APU.**

For assistance please contact the Institutional Review Board Coordinator at 626.815.2036.