

Recommendations for Jeevan Gnanodaya School for the Deaf

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I spent two days (Feb 7 and 8, 2010) observing classes at JG. I observed all classes 1-10th standards, the ITI school as well as the primary and nursery school classes. I spent about 20 minutes in each class for the deaf students and about 15 minutes with the hearing children in the nursery school. In between observations and after each day, I would debrief with Mr. Devarajan (add his title/job here) about the long-term goals for the students as well as some of my observations. Unfortunately (perhaps, as expected), there was not actually enough time for us to discuss all of the needs of the school. Raji Hariharan served as my Tamil-English interpreter. She is a native speaker of Tamil and English with an MS in Psychology and is a freelance German translator. She interpreted conversations between Mr. Devarajan and myself, as well as some of the instructions and student responses in each of the classes.

In retrospect, 2 days were not enough to achieve all of my observational goals and questions. I would have appreciated the opportunity to speak with older students individually as well as with the parents (see questions at end). I am grateful to Mr. Devarajan for this opportunity and for the few conversations that we were able to have in the little time. Jeevan also helped immensely in some of my communication with the students between American Sign Language (me) and Indian Sign Language (the students). I would like to thank everyone at JG for their time and for allowing me to observe. The students deserve special praise for their attention, their hard work, and the lovely program they had for us at the end.

General Observations and Needs:

The following are my general observation for all of the students based on the short time that I was there:

- Teachers and classrooms are in need visual classroom materials and manipulatives: Since the students are deaf, they are visual learners and they rely on their other senses to fill the gap and help them learn. I noticed that the teachers had drawn pictures, diagrams, illustrations, etc. to hang around their classrooms. I appreciate the resourcefulness, but it is not enough for these students. We need to provide these students with as many authentic, accurate, colorful visuals (posters, maps, globes, flags, etc.) for the classrooms and tactile manipulatives (flashcards, magnetic letters for the younger children, etc.).
 - If we could also provide these for the students to use in the homes in order to enhance learning , it would be even more beneficial.
- The school must be equipped with a computer lab with full internet access and webcams (currently there aren't any such facilities): This will be beneficial for both the students and the teachers. There are a wealth of resources for teachers and students on the internet including audio visual tools. More importantly, most of the Deaf World communicates across continents and states by webcam and videophone. These students should be aware that there are other deaf people in the

world like them. The parents can also benefit from meeting other parents of deaf children. With access to internet and thus access to international resources in deaf education, this would be a great step in the right direction to connecting the students with other Deaf children as well as maintaining their contact with Vicki and Barry at Gallaudet University. This would also help streamline all communication with Mr. Devarajan and future professionals who work with the school.

- **Teacher training and Professional Development:** This is perhaps my greatest concern for this school. As I will emphasize several times throughout this report, these students are deaf. The teachers and parents are the most important influences on these students and their future expectations and opportunities. In order to be an effective teacher for a mainstream classroom, one requires extensive training and experience with mentorship. In order to be an effective teacher for deaf students, one requires specialized training for students who do not hear. With JG's teachers, I noticed they do not sign nor use any kind of interactive teaching style. I did notice that they have great affection for the students and genuinely care for their success. I realize that this is a charity school and it is difficult to find teachers who fit the required qualifications. Given the history the teachers have with the school and their strong desire to work with these students, I strongly recommend that the teachers go through extensive, specialized training for teacher deaf students (at all grades).
 - Included in this should also be the need for Sign Language training: I am not against the children receiving Speech-Language Therapy or the teachers using such techniques in the classroom. However, these techniques should be used simply for that purpose: to teach the children to speak and how to use their visual and auditory localization skills in a survival way. The language of the classroom should be in Sign Language. In order for children to learn language, cognition and social-emotional development, they must be taught in their first language (typically the language of the home). In the case of deaf children, they learn best in a visual-spacial modality. That means that the students should be learning their content (school subjects such as Math, Science, etc.) in the visual-spacial modality or Sign Language. They will need speaking skills to get around independently in India. However, the cognitive skills will flourish the most effectively if taught in Sign Language.
 - At the same time, this is only effective if the resources for teaching in Sign Language are there. What I noticed in my observations was that in the younger grades, teachers used Speech Therapy techniques while in the older grades, teachers would lecture and students had to lip-read the content. I was surprised to not see any teachers (except the Drafting Teacher in ITI) using any Sign Language with the students. One course for the teachers of the younger children is not enough. Ideally, the teachers would be fluent in the language and trained in how to use the language as a medium of instruction while also teaching Tamil language and literacy. One way we can help the teachers in finding these resources could be with other schools for the deaf in

India and connecting all of them online (see earlier comment about the need for internet).

- The one teacher who did sign with the students is the Drafting teacher (Engineering Drawing – see video). This teacher is deaf and was educated at Jeevan Gnanodaya. I also noticed that in his class, the students were fully engaged with and interacting with the teacher. Perhaps other teachers can learn the language and teaching strategies from him.
- Early Intervention and Home Visitor services: Given the nature of the school and the students' needs, JG should institute Early Intervention (EI) services with the families of the deaf children. This involves hired professionals going to the families' homes and working with both the parents and children on language and literacy, using the resources in the home, informing the parents of services in the community, etc. EI is typically meant only for birth-3 aged children. For older children, there should be hired professionals continuing the home visits and triangulating the communication between the schools and the families. These professionals can assess the needs of the families in their homes as well as continue encouraging language and literacy teaching using their own resources. The NRHM (National Rural Health Mission) functions in a similar way of teaching in rural villages public health issues. This may be an agency to tap into for suggestions and connections.
- Generally: I noticed that these children – all of them – are very smart! They are very happy at JG and the staff takes wonderful care of them! These children have the potential to do *anything* so we must make it happen!

Grade-specific observations and suggestions:

1st-5th Standards:

- There was little to no transition between lessons (ex. Students name animals, then suddenly fruits, then suddenly numbers). I suspect this was done for my (the observer) benefit, but I think this can confuse the students and encourage them to not focus on their task.
- The teacher must sign the vocabulary words (initially, not as a last resort) and model the task they want the student to do. These are younger children who require a lot of scaffolding and modeling of instructions.
- Drum activity: One teacher would hit the drum while the students signed (?) and recited a poem. Each student should have a turn with feeling the drum's vibrations during this activity.
- The lessons should revolve around a theme for the day or the week in order to integrate and focus the content the students are learning.
- Every object in the classroom should be labeled in Tamil.
- Given these are small classes, every single student should be fully engaged with the teacher and the lessons! Although their attention spans are short (because they are younger), the teachers can still work to engage each student fully.

6th -8th Standards:

- Visuals visuals visuals! These classrooms need models, diagrams, posters, maps, etc. for the students. These posters and models should be all over the classroom, for the students to see. If the current lesson or theme reflects something on a given poster, that poster should be temporarily moved to the front of the room so that the students see it and are reminded to focus on that theme for the time being (week, month, etc.).
- The teachers were lecturing their lessons and students copied notes from the board. Sometimes the teachers would write questions on the board and the students had to write the answers on the boards. This style can be more interactive and involve discussion, rather than simply question and answer.
 - For example: in 7th Standard Social Studies, the teacher asked the question “What is a citizen”? A student wrote the answer from the book on the board. Some students said “India”. It would have been very interesting to see a discussion from this age-group about what the *concept of citizen* means to these students.
- Students should be encouraged to point, gesture and use any kind of manual communication to express their response articulately.
- I noticed the teachers were speaking very quickly when lecturing – I suspect they were nervous by my presence.
- These older students are lip-reading very technical content and are expected to learn this and then prove themselves on the very stressful, 10th standard board exams. These students manage to still pass their exams, but I am worried they are not fully learning the content. My earlier suggestion about the use of Sign Language is imperative in such cases.

Long-term Goals and Needs:

- The students should be encouraged to use Sign Language amongst each other. The older students should be encouraged to mentor the younger students.
- Mr. D has mentioned the difficulty in finding qualified staff to teach at JG. One possibly short-term solution is finding student interns from Gallaudet University and deaf volunteers other such institutions to teach for 6 months or 1 year at a time.
- Resources: I don't have the answers, but Mr. D and the teachers needs resources on how to teach students bilingually (Tamil and Sign Language). Generally, there should be a well-connected network of effective deaf educators in India. With internet resources, they can also easily be connected with deaf educators in the US and around the world.
- More information: It would be extremely beneficial for both Mr. D, JG teachers and staff to observe other deaf education classes in schools around India. It would be equally beneficial for the Asha project stewards to observe schools for the deaf in the Midwest (I recommend Indiana School for the Deaf as they have a bilingual/bicultural program (ASL/English). Illinois School for the Deaf also has

a great program to observe). This way everyone can have some context and understanding of my recommendations.

Questions for JG teachers, parents and students:

- What is the literacy level of the students at each grade level?
 - What is their reading level
 - How articulately are they writing and expressing themselves (grade-appropriate)?
- Do the older students receive Health Education?
- What does their note-taking look like?
 - Do they understand their own notes?
 - What are their study habits?
- How do they feel before and after they take tests?
- If they make mistakes on homework or lessons, how do they know?
 - How do they correct themselves and learn from this?
- How do the students (especially older students) communicate with their parents and siblings?
- Other than Vicki and Barry, have the students ever met any deaf adults?
- How are the parents coping with meeting the needs of their deaf children?
- What kinds of questions do the parents have and what resources would they need?
- What are the long-term goals the parents have for their children?