

Fall 2018

Community in All Education

Sophia Vancer Kooy

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

Recommended Citation

Kooy, Sophia Vancer, "Community in All Education" (2018). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 2978.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2978

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Community in All Education

Sophia Vander Kooy
Trilochan-Ji and Murari-Ji
Internship Final Report

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my SIT staff and peers for their countless encouragement and guidance throughout this semester and all my professors at Hope College for their support from abroad. In addition, I would like to especially thank KIRAN Society and the beautiful students and staff that make it up for hosting me throughout my internship, believing in me, and aiding me throughout the challenges. The friends I have gained throughout this experience have been fundamental to my growth and I hope this paper does justice to all they have given me.

Abstract:

My internship experience at KIRAN allowed my newly lit interest in holistic education to connect with my lifelong passion for disability rights. Prior to my study abroad experience, I had been interested in alternative education and the role that empowerment plays in student success. I devoted research papers, conversations, and volunteer work to these fields and the organizations that contributed to them. However, I always separated these interests from my passion for disability rights. KIRAN has shown me not only the many ways in which holistic education can coincide with disability rights, but the necessity that it does. From my observations and research, I have come to conclude that a strong sense of community is the ultimate bridge between empowerment and education for students of all abilities. This paper tries to justify this conclusion with detailed descriptions of my work at KIRAN, my research on broader fields pertaining to child rights, community psychology, and inclusive education, and the perspectives of my wonderful coworkers.

Literature Review:

The Disability Rights Movement in India began in the early 1970s as a subcategory of the firey and emerging societal push for social justice. Nelinka Mehrotra studied the disability rights movements in India through the lens of the social and political contexts in which its success and hardships emerged. In particular, she found that India's Women's Movement combined with the efforts of international organization created a "more conducive space for the political mobilisation of marginalised groups such as the disabled" (Methrotra, 65). With its name relevantly placed in the social justice conversation, the Disability Rights Movement took shape. As the movement began to prioritize education and work rights, the Student Movement latched onto the increasing momentum. Built on bringing awareness to the disparity between government funded and private education, the Student Movement used the Disability Rights Movement to emphasize those affected most by the growing divide. "Students, except those who are sent to expensive public schools, are faced with overcrowded classes, not enough classrooms and playgrounds, not enough teachers, and those who are ill-paid." (Nigam, 80). As the force of the two movement took to a global scale, the government of India began undertaking an education reform that included disability rights from the beginning.

The many laws, amendments, and schemes that frame disability rights in India pay tribute to the government's efforts to continuously encourage the wellbeing of individuals with disabilities. Disability was first brought into the realm of education law in 1986 with the National Policy on Education (NPE) which outlined both mainstream and separate schools for students with disabilities (Bajpai, 420). The Right to Education Act (RTE) of 2009, amended in 2012, made free and compulsory education a fundamental right to all children ages 6 to 14 regardless

of their ability or “section of society” (RTE). RTE replaced the separate schools initiative with requirements for inclusive education that entitles all students the resources, from special educators to accessible buildings, they need to succeed (RTE). However, the most recent adaptation of RTE designates the specifics of disability rights to the The Persons With Disabilities Act of 2016 (PWD). Although the act was originally implemented as the Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights, and Full Participation Act of 1995, the many revisions have created the most inclusive strategy to ensuring disability rights in India yet (Bhatnagar & Das, 17). The revision was passed to specifically ensure that India held up the details of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that it signed onto. PWD establishes the current definition of individuals with disabilities and the different diagnosis that fall under it, the establishment of guardianship, authorities, rights, and entitlements (Bhatnagar & Das, 25). However encompassing the established legislature may be, there is still a large gap between these laws and their implementation in both government and private classrooms.

This disparity is encouraged by the ways in which India has interpreted and failed to recognize parts of the global expectation. CRPD, the model in which PWD follows, calls for a global emphasis on inclusive and accessible education for all students (CRPD, 65). Yet, CRPD doesn't have an exact definition of inclusive education. Generally, states have interpreted the law to define inclusive education as “one education system to fit the needs of all students” (Jokinen, 71). However, many states that have ratified CRPD continue to have separate school systems in with opportunities for both inclusive and special education units (Jokinen, 72). Special education is commonly seen as a specific unit that only consists of students with different abilities and inclusive education is a unit that combines students with different abilities with those without

(Jokinen, 72). India allows the states to use their agency to analyze the needs of different communities to create both inclusive and special education school systems. Initiatives such as the Education for All Movement (2001) and the Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005) have focussed attention on creating more structured educations laws surrounding children with disabilities in Northern India and although trail-blazing, have not resulted in mirrored legislature on the federal level (Bhatnagar & Das, 18). In addition, RTE only grants the fundamental right of education to elementary students, children ages 6 to 14, which defies the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child which entitles all individuals under the age of 18 to be recognized as children (CRC, 72). With both the global model and the national enforcement lacking proper clarification and enforcement, many children with disabilities within India slip through the systems without any recognition of their rights and entitlements.

Within this controversy and confusion lies a growing plethora of debates on the most effective teaching styles within education of students with disabilities. For example, researchers Pauline Davis and Lani Florian have created a theory that devises distinct approach for each "strand" of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; behavior, emotional, and social development; and sensory and physical (Davis, 4). In addition, Davis and Fluorine have sub approaches under each strand which further specifies the children's ability and formulates approaches to their needs accordingly. Many scholars have come to conclusions similar to Davis and Flourine, but many states struggle to find the resources to parallely implement such individualized educational approaches. Other scholars suggest that inclusive classrooms don't necessarily require more individualization, but more teamwork. In research on

inclusive elementary reading groups, Dr. Mary R. Coakley-Fields suggests that simply creating space for students to help each other and demonstrate their own unique strengths can be extremely effective in the growth of an overall classroom (Coakley-Fields, 20). Although easier to put into practice than the indepth individualized approach, many educators are pressured into prioritizing standardized test outcomes over fostering an empowering classroom environment (Coakley-Fields, 18). These approaches to effective inclusive education serve as great suggestions but are rarely seen executed in practice due to the numerous external challenges that educators face.

However, some educational institutions seem to find a way to bring their student's rights to light despite the monetary and resource barriers. In the particular case of KIRAN Society, an NGO and educational center working to empower students with different abilities and of marginalized people groups, a focus on community separates their approach from much of the rest. KIRAN has both an inclusive and special education unit, which includes a subunit of Hearing Impaired (HI) learning, that operates all within the same campus. Their structure creates an environment in which students play and learn side-by-side while still providing the more individualized approaches similar to the one suggested by Davis and Flourine. Research conducted at the University of Washington has found that an inclusive student community begins with a school-wide emphasis on leadership and empowerment, support and resources, climate and diversity, and a sense of satisfaction (Cauce, 1). However, other researchers have found that the emphasis on community, specifically in the world of NGOs, should extend outside the walls of educational centers to the communities they reside within. Shier et al explains that the sustainability of NGOs is best accessed through building a larger "civic footprint" which focuses

on increasing volunteer and donor engagement, collective community gatherings, and linking with other like-minded schools and organizations (Shrier, 73). Although there not a one-size-fits-all solution, an emphasis on community within education has cross-culturally shown to be a catalyst in ensuring student's rights within both special education and inclusive education.

Introduction to Organization:

The word “kiran” means “ray of light” and KIRAN society strives to be just that in the lives of children with different abilities and of marginalized communities. Through its rehabilitation, education, and vocational skills training programs, KIRAN brings holistic empowerment to children in the greater Varanasi area. Founded in 1990 by a small group of people from various social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, a strong commitment to inclusivity started at the roots. Growing with a “bottom-up”, community-based, and holistic philosophy at heart, KIRAN focuses on uplifting children along with the communities they reside in. This mentality emphasizes individualized rehabilitation plans, small classrooms, and family involvement for each and every student. With support from friends around the world, KIRAN is continuously expanding its ray of light while remaining in practice outside of Varanasi, with the people who inspired the initial spark.

Positionality Statement

My passion for disability rights has been greatly influenced by numerous people in my life. I have many close friends and family with different abilities that have undeniably shaped my perception on inclusivity. In addition, I have had the opportunity to volunteer for nonprofits centered on disability rights, teach children with both cognitive and physical different abilities to swim, and work as camp counselor for adults with cognitive different abilities. Due to these experience, I entered KIRAN with clear opinions on disability rights, inclusive education, and

the politically correct diction used to describe individuals with different abilities. Specifically, I came in with the perception that “people-first” language was the most holistic way to represent individuals with different abilities and the understanding that inclusivity means empowering everyone to dream big despite their limitations. Throughout my experience, I tried to stay true to my beliefs, understand different perspectives, and be open to adjusting my own worldview.

Ethical Approach

In order to live up to the mission of KIRAN, I began reflecting on my impact on the students I would be working alongside prior to my arrival. I wanted to ensure that my actions gave as much as they could and took as little as possible. Although the positive and joyful faces that fill every inch of KIRAN may tell a different story, many of the students here are vulnerable not only due to their different abilities but in terms of mental health, attachment, and encouragement as well. Many of the students have suffered abandonment, helplessness, and discouragement. My short-term experience meant that I had to be particularly aware of my words and choices throughout my time.

Task and Performance:

Throughout the past month, I have worked as a Communications Intern at KIRAN Society focusing on creating promotional content and developing community outreach. With the rapidly changing world of an NGO, everyday seemed to bring entirely new tasks and experiences. Yet, all of my projects were centered and driven by my passions and interests. However, the initial shift from Jaipur to a new place brought doubt and uncertainty that left me feeling incapable of diving into these projects with all of my heart. In a phone call with Awadhesh-Ji, he told me to take charge of my own work and seek out the projects that brought me more to the person I know I am capable of being. With this at heart, I encouraged the rapid change of tasks and approached everyday as a student, eager to learn from those around me. As I

centered myself amidst the chaos, I created a personal mission statement for my internship experience: “I am at KIRAN Society to deepen my knowledge and passion for the role that community plays in special education and grow my writing, editing, and leadership skills to further connect the students to those that support them.” My role at KIRAN far exceeds anything that can fit into a sentence but I know the skills, experiences, and relationships I created will forever impact what drives my future.

Adjusting to the separate and bold cultures of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and KIRAN came with challenges, but I gained the most insight by experiencing India without other Americans by my side. Many of my new reflections were centered on my privilege as an English-speaking westerner. The privilege was most evident in the technology issues that came as an irritating challenge for both myself and my fellow western volunteers. KIRAN has no readily accessible computer lab for students, no efficient way of communicating via email, and poor internet connection. As I allowed myself space to understand these challenges for KIRAN, I was able to see that my frustration only stemmed from my privilege of having a lifetime of abundant and fast technology. However, being around non-American westerners made me realize that the western identity is not entirely homogeneous. In the midst of shared meals and tea breaks, I was often drilled with questions about politics and life in the U.S. The pointed accusations often implied that I could speak on behalf of my entire country. Conversations with my Indian co-workers helped me to understand that when they are asked similar questions, their reaction is often fear that their words will encourage the potentially negative image already painted in the minds of those asking. Although some of the questions I received may have been in reaction to negative stereotypes, the context is different because of the economic and power privilege of the U.S.

Through engaging with these questions and having these conversations, I gained patience that I hope to use to find bridges in the midst of dividing discourse within my own country.

Adjusting to the micropolitics within KIRAN also posed new obstacles to navigate and new opportunities to grow. In Jaipur, I handled the rare but existent pretentious and sexist tendency of Indian men in academia with communal scoffs from the people around me. At KIRAN, I felt the weight of these tendencies in a way that left me discouraged at my own ability to navigate my work. Although I was predominately treated with encouragement and respect, I countlessly saw the hard work of my female coworkers go unacknowledged. In the past, I would have harshly judged these situations, encouraged conflict, and demanded that just action be taken. Yet, I have come to realize that I am a guest to KIRAN, India, and all those who have welcomed me along the way. With this in mind, I had to rethink my typical approach to challenging people and I decided to find friends in each one of them. Although I think there are times when calling someone out is effective, I am learning that building friendships first opens the door to more productive conversations. Again, in one of my bi-weekly calls with Awadhesh-Ji, he told me that I should approach everyone knowing that I haven't read their full story. Although my growth is only in its initial stages, I now know that making friends out of challenging people does more for everyone than careless condemnation.

Although I have been able to reflect a lot on the challenging external circumstances, I still feel as though I am at the very beginning stages of understanding my personal growth. Arriving at KIRAN hit me with heavy homesickness that escalated my anxiety and left me spiraling down a slide of doubt at my own ability to make the month something fruitful. Although friendly students and fellow interns came into my life shortly after arriving, I truly felt that the battle had

already been lost and the only way I could manage was by passively getting through the days. This attitude is foreign to my natural hopeful nature and I felt lost at how to help this distinctly different version of myself. However, after completing my initial week of observation, countless crying sessions with brand new friends, and relentless calls home and to my loving friends at SIT, I managed to find stable ground. I don't know the exact turning point, but I believe that diving into the community at KIRAN was fundamental to engaging in my work with renewed spirit. New waves of confidence and self-agency allowed me to ask not only what I needed but what I wanted from my internship experience.

Although my work was mostly dedicated to the Communications Department, I engaged with other departments that allowed me to gain a more holistic understanding of KIRAN and the people that make it up. This began by editing Sister Sangeeta's thoughtful Christmas Newsletter and led to my participation in several unique projects. By engaging with one new person, I found doors to so many more. I was able to work alongside Aradhana Mishra and together, we restructured KIRAN FRIENDS, a new branch of fundraising that focuses on building support within Varanasi. My work with Aradhana helped me to understand the importance of local community engagement to KIRAN's work. I unleashed creativity by creating new flyers, appeal letters, and donation forms. With KIRAN's limited internet access and technology, we had to work within barriers but I am proud with all we were able to accomplish. A link to one of my flyers can be found in Section 1.a. of the appendix. In addition, I was given the opportunity to create a presentation on RTE and PWD for the entire educational department. As an undergraduate and non-Indian student, I felt intimidated by this project but I decided to use the challenge as an opportunity to simply create a space for open-dialogue. From our conversation,

the most fruitful conclusion was the need KIRAN has for a more prominent school counselor. RTE entitles students to a community of support that consists of consistent updates between teachers and parents. Although KIRAN has a system of this, some parents and guardians are really challenging to work with and a counselor could take up the role of home visits and other responsibilities to ensure this relationship is developed. A link to my presentation can be found in Section 1.b of the Appendix. By taking things into my own hands, I was able to gain a lot of knowledge and relationships outside of my core projects that greatly deepened my understanding of KIRAN.

Through editing, organizing, and creating content, I felt like I was also able to help the Communications Department spread KIRAN's light to the greater community. Allowing one project to lead to the next, I gained new experiences, skills, and friends everyday. I made edits to big projects such as the KIRAN's website and proposal for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) India, created a new campaign video, and developed my focus project. My new introduction to the KIRAN website and a link to the new campaign video can be found in Section 2.a. and 2.b. of the appendix. For the video, I wrote the script and helped Samar, KIRAN's Communications Officer, to film and interview. Our vision was a more upbeat, holistic, and positive campaign video that invited viewers to witness the power of KIRAN. As I established my work, I was invited to meetings centered on fundraising and community outreach. Although I spent most of the time listening, I felt like the contributions I made were valued despite my lack of experience and knowledge. As I demonstrated my skills and willingness to listen, I felt that I was encouraged to drive my own experience.

However, I would say the greatest accomplishment of my internship experience was only uncovered after I began to embrace the days without expectation. My first proposal drafted an idea for a book that combined my stories and passion for creative writing with the stories of students at KIRAN. As I came to see the prominent language, ability, and logistic barriers in place, I knew there was no way that my expectation was capable of doing justice to the words of the students. As I let go of my expectations, I developed a new focus project still connected on my passions. The majority of my time was spent developing a system for collecting “Stories for Change,” small essays that bring the successes, dreams, and challenges of students to the greater KIRAN community. I was able to create a questionnaire that would allow teachers to interview students in the form of communication they preferred. The questions are designed to grasp a more holistic understanding of the students and the things they are open to sharing. Rather than simply asking the hardships they have faced, it asks “How did you come to KIRAN?” However, the questionnaire also includes inquiries such as, “If you were Prime Minister for a day what is one thing you would change?” and “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Although this system still requires both the teacher and the communications staff writing the story to interpret the student’s answers, I think it works within KIRAN’s limitations well and will hopefully be a sustainable way of sharing KIRAN’s impact.

My reflection upon my experience at KIRAN will be undoubtedly continuously throughout the foreseeable future, but as of now, I feel like I failed the most in the areas I had thought would have come with ease. One of my “off the job” internship goals was to spend time playing outside and engaging with the students. Although I was able to create relationships with a few, I passed up many opportunities to study with, play with, and converse with many of them.

Most days, I felt so emotionally exhausted after work that I needed time to recharge by reading, writing, or spending time with my fellow volunteers. In retroflex, I think I could have been more purposeful in finding a balance. I choose not to dwell on what could have been and I am trying to remind myself that my response in the moment served value as well. However, I simply hope to use my experiences and reflections from KIRAN to allow me to better engage with, serve, and learn from the communities I am a part of in the future.

Applicability of Internship:

This semester has brought my passions of children's and disability rights, community, and sustainability to center on an entirely new focus: education. Although my mom is a teacher, I spent much of my younger years detesting school and swearing I would never voluntarily spend more time in a classroom than I had to. However, my college experiences and my semester abroad have shown me that education, if holding the right values at heart, can be interesting, accessible, and stimulating for all children. My research throughout the semester has been roughly targeted at special education and the factors that can both lead to empowerment and complacency of students. Through reflection, work experience, observation, interviews, and outside research, my internship experience at KIRAN Society has allowed me to clearly see the vitality of an empowering community in special education. Through an emphasis on this kind of community, I believe KIRAN fosters responsibility, team, and inclusion within its student body that maximizes the opportunities for every child.

For the students at KIRAN, responsibility outstretches the confines of homework to include a genuine willingness to sit in solidarity with peers. Their sense of responsibility for each other's well being shines through their play, school, and meal times. Without hesitation, students

learn sign language to include their peers with hearing impairments in conversation. Although I think there are many factors create this environment at KIRAN, research done on inclusive service learning in the U.S. has identified one of the possible contributing factors (Carter, 48). A case study analysis completed by Carter et al concludes that inclusive service demonstrates how “communities can be strengthened when all members have a chance to share their talents and gifts” (Carter, 54). Most holidays at KIRAN begin with a morning dedicated to gardening, sweeping, and cleaning trash around campus and the surrounding areas. On a more structural level, KIRAN has a growing Human Resources Training Department (HRTC) which allows students to continue their education in the very fields that served them such as social work, special education, and advocacy. Although the numerous service projects and programs encourage inclusivity, KIRAN students make it fully genuine in their simple, daily interactions.

This ingrained sense of responsibility often seeps into the practice and operations of KIRAN’s staff and on-campus families. I noticed that KIRAN’s “bottom-up” philosophy doesn’t only apply to their model of empowerment, but it explains the natural direction in which influence seems to flow. The students inspire the inclusivity and encouragement, and the teachers follow. My first week at KIRAN was spent in full observation of the educational units. In this experience, I witnessed both incredible teachers that used facial vibrations to bring vocal language to students with hearing impairments and teachers that paid little attention to their students with different abilities within their inclusive classrooms. There are obviously language barriers that may prevent me from fully understanding these situations, but the parallelity of inclusion seems far more prominent in the students than in the teachers. Scholar Michelle Commeyras poses the effect of the student-to-teacher learning process in her essay “What Can

We Learn From Student's Questions?" in which she argues that the questions elementary students often reflect a raw intellectual struggle that creates an honest reflection of society (Commeyras, 103). Entire education systems have also identified the power of student-led learning. The American Montessori model of education is built on idea that encouraging questioning and even mistakes is synonymous with learning (Pickering, 4). Although KIRAN doesn't strive to meet any particular model of education, many of the teachers seem fundamentally willing to take notes on inclusivity from their students' actions.

Within special education, the gap between teachers who take this responsibility for inclusivity and those who don't can directly affect the wellbeing of students. For KIRAN, the areas that I witnessed a lack of responsibility within also struggled with work clarification and overall communication. In a developed framework for educational planners, Glowacki-Dudka et al explains that encouraging "reflective learning through open communication" produces what scholars recognize as a "learning community" (Glowacki-Dudka, 62). Although this research is intended to reflect the relationship between educational facilitators and participants, KIRAN may benefit from adopting a framework throughout both its educational and noneducational departments. My focus project for my internship experience was the creation of a "Stories for Change" outline, consent form, and questionnaire that focused on accumulating holistic stories of KIRAN's impact on students. My intention was to create one of these stories during my final week at KIRAN but a lack of efficient communication left the task unfinished. Although I realize filling all the cracks is nearly impossible for any large organization with as many moving parts as KIRAN, I think placing a larger emphasis on honest and reflective communication could greatly boost efficiency and morale. Not only do these cracks need to be addressed for the

benefit of the students but for the growth of an organization that holds a common mission at heart.

From my observations, the staff members that were able to work within KIRAN's limitations did so by staying true to a strong, personal mission statement. In her book *The Power of Why*, Amanda Lang explains her theory on how "why power" can fuel innovation and create change (Lang, 53). For many modern wellness scholars, "why power" is as simple as keeping a check on "why" one is completing a task, working for a goal, or waking up in the morning. In a content analysis study on the effects of the awareness of a personal mission statement on undergraduate students, it was found that having defined values driving collegiate work can serve as a "cognitive developmental tool to actively engage ethical reasoning awareness and encourage moral formation and development within the learning environment" (Laird-Magee, 156). At KIRAN, I saw many teachers work around minimal writing utensils, various learning styles and abilities, and distractions to create positive environments for students. Within a conversation and presentation I facilitated on RTE and PWD, KIRAN special educator, Tulika Dey, said that she chooses to be a teacher because it is a daily opportunity to empower the world. In other words, Tulika's "why power" is empowerment and with that, she forms her classes, lessons, and motivation. The amount of staff members that are able to come back to their personal missions and "why power" are the ones able to surpass the challenges to continue with passion and determination in their work.

Yet, successful teams can only be developed when an overarching common goal, a general mission statement, is sought out by all moving parts. In other words, the driving force of the individual needs to be reflective of the broader goal of the group in order to create a team

unit that is inclusive, cohesive, and efficient. Although the “success” of a team unit may be subjective, many leaders in NGO management understand it as staying true to the driving mission in the many ways that can look. Brian A. Gallagher, the Executive Officer of United Way Worldwide, emphasizes the importance of a mission and vision but also explains that fulfilling them comes down to “developing a powerful strategy and execution” (Gallagher, 13). KIRAN has both a vision and mission approved by the board of trustees that is prominent on the website and in advertisements. The current mission statement of KIRAN is: “To enable differently-abled children and youth from marginalized families to get rehabilitation, education and vocational training, so that they are empowered to take care of their needs and become fully included into mainstream society.” As Gallagher explains, accepting the mission is only the first step and from my observations, KIRAN struggles with developing a concrete strategy to continuously reach that mission as a team. In an interview with KIRAN’s founder and Executive Director, Sister Sangeeta JK, said that if she had to encapsulate the spirit of KIRAN in a sentence she would say, “come, let us walk in hope together.” Although KIRAN has no concrete strategy for accomplishing their mission, I am confident that the vision of its leaders will continue to find a way to bring its goals into light.

However, in order for this process to be fruitful, mission statements have to be completely representative of the true goal of the organization. In my opinion, KIRAN’s mission statement defines it’s aim but the word choice within it is fundamentally exclusionary. Within the statement, the words “differently-abled youth” uses a linguistic prescription that places the “disability” before the personhood of the child. The 1970s Disability Rights movement in the U.S. brought the rise of “people-first” language to much of the world. Some scholars argue that

any singular way to speak of a disability encourages the idea that there is only way to imagine a disability (Titchkosky, 128). However, I choose to use people-first language because I believe placing personhood before disability can have a direct effect on the self-perception of people with disabilities. Although there is validity in the critique of “people-first” language, I think the representation of children needs to be particularly aware of the disempowerment that can arise from exclusionary language. For adolescence, an unjust social atmosphere is one of the most prominent links to feelings of social exclusion (Umlauf, 534). From my observations, I believe that the language of the mission statement effects the ways in which staff choose to talk on behalf of students and their stories. Prior to the creation of the new “Stories for Change” outline, many of the stories advertised by KIRAN focused only on the hardships and disabilities of the students. If these practices were to affect the students perception of their own social atmosphere, there could be long term effects on their feelings of social exclusion and overall capability.

Despite the challenges, KIRAN has found a way to serve, uplift, and bring education to thousands of students that would have otherwise been set aside from the societies they reside within. Throughout my time at KIRAN, I struggled to identify what specific characteristics set KIRAN apart from other educational centers and NGO that strive for the same kind of inclusive learning. As of now, my biggest conclusion is that the model of true inclusivity comes from the authenticity of the students. In a world that generally acknowledged that education is the start of change, this gives me hope. KIRAN is producing students that don’t recognize empowerment as a forced act, but a human right. Evident in the ways in which students of all abilities and from various communities meet each other in their interaction, the students at KIRAN are the extensions of the mission statement. If the pieces of KIRAN that have fallen out of sync with this

driving force can realign in model of the students, the reach of the “ray of light” will continue to sustainably expand. In the context of the program at large, the community at KIRAN, built on responsibility, team, and inclusion, is representative of the potential for education systems around the world.

Conclusion:

Throughout this semester, I have focused my energy on researching inclusive special education but I have come to understand that words without actions lay stagnant. My internship experience at KIRAN has given me the opportunity to take my readings, writings, and conversions to life with purpose and passion. However, I was only able to take this opportunity with full force after I allowed the power of community to model my way. Like the inclusive practices of KIRAN, my path to this community was guided by the students. Although I wish I had dedicated more time to building relationships with many of them, I realize that I only became open with my own vulnerable state after learning from students whose reliance on others is not a choice. In their light, I found the strength to allow the KIRAN community to bring me the tools I needed to be my best self.

I often consider individuals with different abilities of the most marginalized demographics because even their fight is done by others. History demonstrates very few times in which individuals with different abilities have been given the opportunity to proclaim their needs and wants. The world needs the allies and caregivers that stand by disability rights, but I think all entities that are created to defend these rights would be more sustainable if they handed the lead over to those they intend to serve. In allowing KIRAN’s “bottom-up” philosophy to seep into my personal life, I was able to find my own agency which leaves me to ponder the possibilities of

our world if we sought to empower those most reliant on others. I am proud of my work and growth alongside KIRAN, but the community I found has lit a fire inside my heart that marks the end of this semester as the beginning of a lifelong fight.

Appendix:

Section 1: a.)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6cxiOZM0H6hOS1Uc2FHZTdkMIJhakVsSmstRjhCMUIkaTlF/view>

b.)

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1_-jdB6_dmdVxfjscb2s1emr8km8pjpg5nUa-yzGpO9js/edit?usp=sharing

Section 2: a.) The word “kiran” means “ray of light” and KIRAN society strives to be just that in the lives of children with different abilities and of marginalized communities. Through our rehabilitation, education, and vocational skills training programs, we bring holistic empowerment to the children we serve in the greater Varanasi area. Founded in 1990 by a small group of people from various social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, our commitment to inclusivity started at the roots. Growing with our “bottom-up” philosophy at heart, we focus on uplifting our children along with the communities they reside in. This mission emphasizes individualized rehabilitation plans, small classrooms, family involvement, and sustainability with continuous opportunities for students to expand their independence. With the support of our friends around the world, we are proud to continuously grow our ray of light while remaining in practice outside of Varanasi, with the people who inspired our initial spark.

b.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOu9r-X3DEk&feature=youtu.be>

Works Cited

- Baker, Beth. "Arts Education: Does Arts Training Improve Social and Academic Skills?" *CQ Researcher*, vol. 22, no. 11, Mar. 2012, pp. 253–276. *EBSCOhost*, login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=119984966&site=ehost-live.
- Bajpai, Asha. *Child Rights in India: Law, Policy, and Practice*. Oxford India, 2008.
- Bhatnagar, N., & Das, A. (2014) Attitudes of Secondary Regular School Teachers Toward Inclusive Education in New Delhi, India: A Qualitative Study. *Exceptionality Education International*, 24, 17-30. Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/eei/vol24/iss2/2>
- Carter, Erik W. 1.erik.carter@vanderbilt.ed., et al. "Engaging Youth With and Without Significant Disabilities in Inclusive Service Learning." *Teaching Exceptional Children*, vol. 44, no. 5, May 2012, pp. 46–54. *EBSCOhost*, login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=74695067&site=ehost-live
- Commeyras, Michelle. "What Can We Learn from Students' Questions?" *Theory Into Practice*, vol. 34, Spring 1995, pp. 101–106. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/00405849509543666.
- Dostal, Hannah1, hannah.dostal@uconn.ed., et al. "Supporting the Literacy Development of Students Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing in Inclusive Classrooms." *Reading Teacher*, vol. 71, no. 3, Nov. 2017, pp. 327–334. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1002/trtr.1619.
- Elton-Chalcraft, Sally1, et al. "Segregation, Integration, Inclusion and Effective Provision: A

Case Study of Perspectives from Special Educational Needs Children, Parents and Teachers in Bangalore India.” *International Journal of Special Education*, vol. 31, no. 1, Feb. 2016, pp. 2–9. *EBSCOhost*,
login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=116803898&site=ehost-live

Gallagher, Brian A. “It’s About Vision, People And Mission.” *NonProfit Times*, vol. 27, no. 16, Dec. 2013, p. 13. *EBSCOhost*,
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ent&AN=126770730&site=ehost-live.

Glowacki-Dudka, Michelle¹, mdudka@bsu.ed., et al. “Framing Care for Planners of Education Programs.” *Adult Learning*, vol. 29, no. 2, May 2018, pp. 62–71. *EBSCOhost*,
doi:10.1177/1045159517750664.

HEJNOVA, PETRA. “Beyond Dark and Bright: Towards a More Holistic Understanding of Inter-Group Networks.” *Public Administration*, vol. 88, no. 3, Sept. 2010, pp. 741–763. *EBSCOhost*,
doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2010.01825.x.

Hernandez, Vanessa Torres. “Making Good on the Promise of International Law: The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Inclusive Education in China and India.” *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, Mar. 2008, pp. 497–527. *EBSCOhost*,
login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=32462471&site=ehost-live.

Laird-Magee, Tyler¹, et al. “Personal Values and Mission Statement: A Reflective Activity to

- Aid Moral Development.” *Journal of Education for Business*, vol. 90, no. 3, Apr. 2015, pp. 156–163. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/08832323.2015.1007907.
- MEHROTRA, NILIKA. “Disability Rights Movements in India: Politics and Practice.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 46, no. 6, 2011, pp. 65–72. *JSTOR*, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27918121
- Nigam, Aditya. “Student Movement and Education Policy.” *Social Scientist*, vol. 14, no. 2/3, 1986, pp. 79–86. *JSTOR*, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3520176.
- Parliament of India, Education. “The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE).” *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*, Legislative Department, 2009.
- Pickering, Joyce^{1,2}, president@amshq.or. “Respecting the Child.” *Montessori Life*, vol. 25, no. 2, Summer 2013, p. 4. *EBSCOhost*, login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=87525781&site=ehost-live.
- Shier, Micheal L. 1.mshier@sp2.upenn.ed., et al. “Nonprofits and the Promotion of Civic Engagement: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the ‘Civic Footprint’ of Nonprofits within Local Communities.” *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit & Social Economy Research / Revue Canadienne de Recherche Sur Les OSBL et l’économie Sociale*, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 57–75. *EBSCOhost*.
- Titchkosky, Tanya. “Disability: A Rose by Any Other Name? ‘People-First’ Language in Canadian Society.” *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology*, vol. 38, no. 2, May 2001, pp. 125–140. *EBSCOhost*,

login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ssf&AN=510154660&site=ehost-live.

Umlauft, Sören¹, soeren.umlauft@paedagogik.uni-halle. d., and Claudia¹ Dalbert. “Justice Experiences and Feelings of Exclusion.” *Social Psychology of Education*, vol. 20, no. 3, Sept. 2017, pp. 565–587. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1007/s11218-017-9387-9.

United Nations, UNHCR. “United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.” *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Te Puni Kokiri, 1999.

Walsh, Dana¹, and Heather, Perry. “Good Sociology and Good Service-Learning: Designing a Collaborative Relationship to Accomplish Mutual Goals.” *Currents in Teaching & Learning*, vol. 7, no. 1, Fall 2014, pp. 117–130. *EBSCOhost*, login.ezproxy.hope.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=101595970&site=ehost-live.

What About the Host Agency? Nonprofit Perspectives on Community-Based Student Learning and Volunteering.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly.*, vol. 41, no. 6, Sage Publications, Dec. 2012, pp. 1029–50.

