

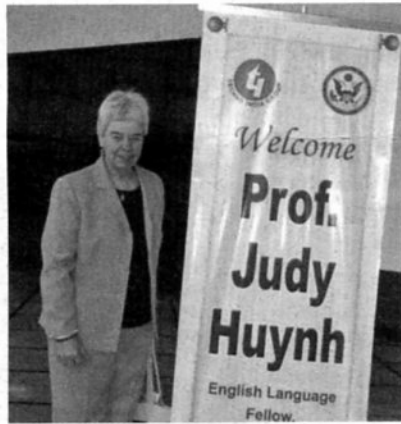


TEACHER TRAINING IN INDIA...

By Judy Huynh

Last January I was given the opportunity to go to India for two weeks to do teacher training for iEARN (International Education and Research Network). This was done at the invitation of the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Delhi, India. I was asked to introduce teachers to online classroom interaction through participation in iEARN. As the Indian students become involved in the iEARN projects, they will interact with students in classrooms in the U.S. and around the world to collaborate on projects in science, math, art, social studies, and/or language arts. Through these interactions, they will master basic technology skills and improve their communication skills. They will also build friendships with people from other countries and cultures, helping them to develop a global perspective. This, I believe, is a step towards peace and understanding in the world.

My first workshop was at St. Xavier's School in Patna, one



of the more economically depressed areas of India. There were 28 teachers from various schools in the area participating in the workshop. They were really excited to learn new skills and to be able to communicate in English with other teachers around the world on the iEARN

forums. Before doing the workshop, I was concerned about how the poorest schools, with no computers, would be able to participate in a global telecommunications network such as iEARN. However, I discovered that in the western regions of India where some schools were already participating in iEARN, those schools with computer access partnered with schools that didn't have access, and posted their work on the iEARN forums for them. There is great disparity among the schools in India and their access to technology, but the teachers are all willing to work together so that everyone can benefit.

After completing the workshop in Patna, I returned to Kolkata for two free days. I spent Sunday doing some sightseeing around Kolkata, visiting the Victoria Memorial, the markets and the Ganges River. The streets were crowded with cars, rickshaws, bicycles, motorbikes, animals, and

people. There are over thirteen million people living in Kolkata, so the congestion on the streets is a real problem. Trash and garbage are everywhere, and pollution of the rivers and air is very evident. But in spite of the pollution, there is so much beauty. The Indian women, in their colorful saris and salwar-kameezes, are absolutely gorgeous! And the children, with their sparkling eyes and winsome smiles, are extremely charming. Even the food in India is beautiful! The fruits and vegetables in the markets are always artistically arranged, and truly a delight to the eye. The naan, chapattis, dosas, dahl, samosas, and curries are works of art – and they taste good, too.

After enjoying two free days, I did a second workshop at Techno-India, a very high tech training school in Kolkata. Nearly 40 teachers attended the workshop there. Again, the teachers were wonderful and very excited about their participation in the workshop. In addition to the teacher trainings, I did three other short presentations to high school students, sharing resources for interactive online English learning. The students were delighted to have an "English Specialist" come to share with them; I was treated like a rock star, with the students clamoring for my autograph after my talk! Education is very important in India.

During my short visit, I discovered that India is a land of great contrasts. There are small "Silicon Valley islands", where it's very high tech, and the people are highly educated and very affluent. However, surrounding these high tech areas is the rest of India. Many people are living in huge, miserable slums where they lack the basic necessities of life (as seen in *Slumdog Millionaire*). Approximately 26 percent of India's population lives below the poverty level of a dollar a day. The literacy rate is around 62%. India is aware of the many challenges facing them, such as the need for adequate nutrition, universal education, universal health care, affordable housing, and a clean environment. The teachers in India are especially aware of these challenges and are doing their best to educate the next generation to be global citizens, prepared to find solutions to these challenges. Because of these teachers, I feel confident that India's future is in good hands. They understand that we are one world, and that we must all work together if we are to achieve a future of peace and harmony and justice.

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