

Case Study Research - A Model of Best Practice at Loreto Day School, Sealdah, Calcutta - Occasional Paper No. 1, 36 p.



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**EDUCATION SECTOR GROUP
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OCCASIONAL EDUCATION PAPERS**

This is the first of a series of occasional papers commissioned by the Education Sector Group of the UK Government's Department for International Development in India. Each paper represents a study or a piece of research on some aspect of education. The studies aim to provide

informed judgements from which policy decisions may be drawn, or to provide models of quality, through which the understanding and practice of teaching and learning may be enhanced. The material produced is of interest to a wide audience of education professionals, both in India and elsewhere.

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1. Researcher's Preface

This study has arisen out of the need to document the practices of exceptional and experimental schools in India. The value of profiling unique cases of 'best practice' in a context where it is acknowledged that ".. after 50 years of independence, India's progress in the sphere of education

has been woefully inadequate" is self-evident (Shukla and Kaul, 1998, p. 14). At this time in the history of Indian education, models of good practice are sorely needed to address a vacuum which exists in theorising and practising a new departure in Indian Education. Whilst a small and necessarily limited case study of a single school with roots in Anglo-Irish Catholic missionary tradition seems hardly the vehicle for turning the story of education in India since 1947 from a tale of woe into a model for widespread change, vision and hope, it does address itself to several important issues.

Both the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, and the Revised Policy Formation (RPF) 1992 of the Government of India, concerned themselves with a number of fundamental social and political dimensions of education. These could be summed up as the view that education is a basic education right, that it has a cultural role in nation-building, that it is linked to production, productivity and the economy, and

finally, that it is the bedrock on which social equality rests and might be achieved (see Shotton, 1998, p. 7). But the gap between the rhetoric of policy and the realities of classroom life is self-evident. The dream of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has yet to be realised in India where more than half the world's children who should be in primary school, are not. Out of 128 million children missing from the school rolls worldwide, some 64 million ply their trade on the streets and fields of India. So, where a school appears to take seriously the imperative of children's rights, to be sensitive to its multi-faith community, to build vocational skills among para-teachers, parents and streetchildren, and to confront the notion of privilege from the paradoxical position of its own privilege, such a school stands apart.

This case study of Loreto Day School, Sealdah, Calcutta, is an attempt to document a process of change within a school over a period of twenty years - a school transformation which has been marked by a movement away from privilege and

towards community. At the same time, the school has managed to integrate rich and poor children, and without resorting to any form of selection, has retained high quality results. It is acknowledged at the outset that no school offers a perfect and transferable model which can be replicated in any other setting, against any other backdrop. Yet, within the uniqueness of Loreto Sealdah are contained the characteristics and values which have driven the process of change, and these may be applied more generally. Models of best practice which are grounded in the realities of a particular context and school life are capable both of refining our understanding of what constitutes a good education, as well as informing and improving practice in other schools.

This research has been undertaken as an independent funded project of DFID Education Projects Office, British Council Division, New Delhi. I acknowledge with thanks the comments and suggestions of Ms Barbara Payne (DFID), Dr Tom Welsh (EPO) and Sister Cyril (Loreto Day School, Sealdah).

I would also like to thank the teaching and administrative staff; pupils, both 'regular' and 'rainbow'; and the community at Loreto Sealdah for their time, openness and hospitality.

Tansy Jessop, April 1998



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2. Executive Summary

Research into models of 'best practice' in primary and secondary schooling in recent years has sought to pin down

generic indicators which characterise 'good' schools. These have ranged from the school's value system, its academic achievements, the quality of relationships, to leadership, community-building and the provision of adequate resources. In the Indian context, Loreto Day School, Sealdah, has been identified as a school which provides a unique and interesting model of best practice. In 1997, education officials from six states associated with the DPEP Project visited the school to look at examples of experimental practice within the school, and to meet with the principal, Sr Cyril, who has subsequently been co-opted as a Resource Person for DPEP.

DFIDI Education Projects Office, British Council, commissioned a small scale research study to investigate and identify the characteristics of best practice at Loreto Sealdah. This study was carried out in March and April 1998. Three visits to the school took place during which data were collected using audio-taped interviews, observations, discussion groups with pupils and documentary analysis. The

findings of the study are outlined in this report.

The report is divided into four major components. In the first section, there is a description of the school, its programmes, projects, values and ethos. The second section reflects on the nature of research on best practice, establishes a set of criteria for identifying best practice, and goes on to distil aspects of best practice which are grounded in the reality of Loreto Day School, Sealdah. A third section provides critical discussion of the major findings of the investigation and goes on to explore and challenge some prevailing myths about schooling using Loreto Sealdah as an example. Finally, the report draws some implications for policy and practice out of the study.

The major findings of the investigation may be summarised as follows:

- a shared vision and explicit collective values

provide the catalyst for profound changes within a school setting;

- responsibility and freedom for teachers and pupils alike increases the capacity for human agency ¹;

1 Human agency denotes the capacity for individuals and/or groups to act out their choices against the background of supposedly determined and fixed social structures.

- the power of ideas in school leadership is able to drive change;
- people respond to meaningful social ideals where there are corresponding and imaginative practical strategies for realising them;

- the ways of schools are not inevitable - and therefore paradigm shifts are possible;
- decision-making devolved to school and community level is able to effect massive local change;
- for real change to happen, risks must be taken, mistakes made, and these reflected upon;
- changes need to be responsive to needs if they are not to be cosmetic;
- purely academic goals may obscure the wider role and responsibility of the school;
- where planning and action *go hand-in-hand*, this is able to awaken people's hopes and their commitment to the change process;

- incremental changes which develop alongside the vision but without great fanfare are often the best way of conquering the fear of change;
- teachers who practise what they believe in and contribute to the way things happen in schools enjoy greater job satisfaction;
- the desire for educational transformation is crucial to its execution. ²

2 As Meier (1995) has argued: "The question is not, Is it possible to educate all children well? but rather, Do we want to do it badly enough?" (ibid, p. 3), and further "...the secret ingredient is wanting it badly enough" (ibid., p. 38).

In broad terms, the implications of these findings for

education policy and practice are as follows:

1. The case study points to the fact that education has both a moral and a technical dimension. The power of ideas, values and ideologies are embedded, but also hidden in education statements and actions. Both the technical aspects *and* the moral imperatives of educational transformation need to be made explicit in policy and practice.
2. The devolution of authority to schools and communities is likely to create a climate of 'ownership' which may facilitate change. The *caveat* to this is that without sound leadership and vision, ownership may equally become a force for vested interests within a school, and a buttress for the status quo.
3. Planning and action in response to immediate

local and community needs has been successful in this case of school transformation. A feature of the planning and action has been that authority has been dispersed and delegated rather than centralised in systems of control. ³

3 See Elmore, 1989, "Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions"

4. The flexible and creative reshaping of fixed ideas about the structure of schooling may facilitate change and enable human agents to take action and ownership over these structures. With vision and a sense of purpose, individuals can make a difference.

5. Schools need sound leadership, a core of reasonably well-trained and flexible teachers, and basic resources within which human agency may be

enacted. However, the stretching of resources beyond their 'normal' carrying capacity need not be a deterrent to success.



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3. Case Profile

- 3.1. A Description of Loreto Day School, Sealdah
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3.1. A Description of Loreto Day School, Sealdah

Running from the southern end of Calcutta's green space, the Maidan, to the Hooghly River, north of Howrah Bridge, runs an arterial route that hums and throbs with rickshaws, yellow taxis, buses, lorries and scooters. This is AJC Bose Road. Centrally situated on that road is an unremarkable building, with a grey stippled facade, and covered with the stains of Calcutta's pollution. The building is a classic set of bolt-on buildings, some wings running to five storeys, while others are a mere two or three storeys tall. Inside, there is a modest quadrangle with volleyball hoops at either end, and a

covered area with pillars holding up an additional four storeys. From seven in the morning till late in the evening, the visitor will encounter children, parents, teachers, rural villagers and hawkers selling Kwality ice cream and other edibles in the quad ⁴. The more observant will spot a washing line, a stray dog, two white rabbits and a couple of cockatoos as well. All day long, the smell of dhal, potatoes, onions, rice and mild spices permeates the air, as big cooking pots are stirred and emptied. This is Loreto Day School, Sealdah.

⁴ The hawkers and those selling edibles are generally parents of children at the school, who are using the income from their trade to support their children through school.

Figure 3.1.: AJC Bose Road, Calcutta

Figure 3.2.: Loreto Day School, Sealdah: An unremarkable building

The story of Loreto Sealdah began in 1857, some one hundred and forty years ago, when it became one of the first missionary plants of the Loreto Movement in India. The school was part of a tradition set up by its Anglo-Irish Catholic founders, which sought initially to educate the daughters of Irish and English soldiers and colonists in India, but gradually widened its embrace to include Anglo-Indian pupils of railway families, and then spread its mission to the poor in rural and urban districts of Bengal, the United Provinces, South India and hill stations in Darjeeling, Assam and Simla. The majority of Loreto Schools in India have always been English-medium institutions. In the 20th century, under the leadership of Mother Dorothy, some of the Loreto Schools began to challenge the code for Anglo-Indian schools, which were forbidden to accept more than 25% of

Indian children ⁵. Private institutions were opened side by side to cater for the numbers in excess of the specified 25%. In addition to educating what was arguably an elite in India, the Loreto sisters operated non fee-paying 'free schools' for certain numbers of the poor. There were other attempts to reach out to the poor and destitute, most notably in the establishment of an orphanage and school at Entally, Calcutta. In the latest policy document on Loreto Schools, the preferential love for the poor is stressed, alongside the value of simplicity. Accordingly, 20% of all admissions in Loreto Schools in India are to be reserved for the economically deprived, with the view that:

"The poor child is recognised as an asset since her presence challenges the school community to live by value judgements based on human dignity and not on money, possessions, or even on talent. She is welcomed into school and treated with the same

respect as is accorded to others" (Nurturing to Freedom, 1991, p. 11).

5 Mother Dorothy decided: "I could not bear to close the doors of our schools to Indian children in their own country" (Colmcille, 1968, p. 281).

Loreto Day School, Sealdah, has emerged from a religious tradition which espouses a preferential love for the poor. It has made significant strides to practise the ideals of exercising this preferential option since the late 1970's, when it was predominantly a middle class institution, serving a token number of non fee-paying pupils in separate streams. As convents and private schools go, it was a good school, with sound delivery on its academic promises. But was "being a good school enough"? (Sr Cyril, 1997).

3.2. Option for the Poor

In 1979, Sr. Cyril moved from her post at Loreto House, Calcutta to take over the reins of Loreto Sealdah. At the time there were 790 pupils on the role, of whom 90 were poor and therefore non fee-paying. She felt "uneasy" about imparting 'quality education' to a privileged few while millions of children across India were receiving no education at all. Thus began the realisation of the 'Option for the Poor' ideal which sought to open the school to at least 50% of non fee-paying pupils from nearby slums, 'bustees' and poorer areas of Calcutta. Over a period of less than twenty years the ideal of an option for the poor has largely been realised. On the 1998 school roll, there are 1400 pupils, of whom 700 pay fees, while 700 are non fee-paying. Many of the non fee-paying students receive free uniforms, food and books from the school. These students are subsidised by the fee-paying students, by local and overseas sponsors, and by Dearness Allowance grants made to registered private schools by the West Bengal administration.

Figure 3.3.: Sister Cyril at her desk

3.3. Rainbow School

In 1985, a group of Class IX and X students who were participating in a community leadership initiative felt a similar unease about the number of 'platform' and pavement children living at Sealdah Railway Station and on the streets outside Loreto Sealdah. They raised the issue with teachers at the school and took it up with Sr Cyril. At their inspiration, and with the support of the school's leadership, the pupils conducted a survey of the local streetchildren to ascertain their needs. In response, a proposal followed, which resulted in the setting up of a school-within-a-school for streetchildren who "drop in like rainbows, giving joy as they appear" (Mission Statement, 1997). The rainbow school has progressed from being a 'tag-on' afternoon programme for volunteers to support, to a much more structured and integral programme of curriculum development and child-to-child

teaching and learning. From its small beginnings, it now has a cohort of specially designated staff, including a coordinator, a nurse and social worker and a venue where a roof terrace has been enclosed to become a multi-purpose centre for teaching and learning, washing, playing, sleeping and counselling. The streetchildren are individually tutored by 'regular' pupils from Class V to X, who have been allocated ninety minute timetabled slots of Work Education on a weekly basis for this purpose. 250 'rainbow' children appear on the schools records, but only about sixty to ninety of these drop-in for classes on a daily basis. They are taught the skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as craft and other skills on a one-to-one basis. Life skills teaching includes a savings scheme whereby the streetchildren invest their earnings in bank accounts and are provided with incentives to save. On average, some 50 children per year are placed in schools or programmes outside of the Rainbow School, which are best suited to their language, geographical area or culture.

Although most of these children attend schools which teach in the vernacular, as many as eight streetchildren have been integrated into English-medium programmes at Loreto or other Catholic Schools. A number of ex-Rainbow pupils have found secure jobs as security guards, domestic workers, or hospital staff, and many of the girls have married stable, non-street husbands. They return to visit the programme periodically.

3.4. Rural Child-to-Child Programme

The Rural Child-to-Child Programme was borne out of the experience of a science exhibition conducted by an educational organisation in some rural areas of West Bengal in 1979. The Loreto Sealdah exhibition stand drew the attention of the village children such that they were clambering over the ropes to touch and see the exhibits and talk to the children. When it became clear that the Loreto pupils were engaging in teaching and learning with their peers

from the rural villages, it was decided to enter into negotiations with village school teachers to see whether there were longer term possibilities and relationships which would benefit both the rural and urban pupils. As a result of these negotiations, every Thursday 150 regular students from Loreto engage in child-to-child teaching and learning, mainly science, maths and environmental studies, in ten government aided schools in the Amgachia region. Some 2600 rural children participate in the programme, which is run in groups of about fifteen children by an individual Loreto pupil.

Figure 3.4.: The Rainbow School

Figure 3.5.: A rural village master

3.5. Barefoot Teacher Training Programme (BTTP)

This initiative has been running since 1988 and has touched the lives of some 4000 untrained teachers across India, from

Mizoram in the North East, to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and as far west as Rajasthan. It is aimed at young teachers in village schools or even drop-outs from these 'schools who have no route or access to teacher training, particularly as they have scholastic qualifications which are lower than Class X. The programme uses the term 'barefoot' to refer to the fact that people need only feet to walk, and that shoes are therefore a luxury. Similarly, given the literacy and numeracy needs of millions of children across India, a highly theoretical two year training course for teachers represents a luxury. The 'barefoot' programme is accomplished in a two phase programme which takes a month and emphasises child and activity-centred methodologies using local resources. It has recently been experimenting with a cascade model of training the trainers who live in rural villages and are therefore able to provide ongoing supervision of trainees.

3.6. Feeding Scheme

The school runs a feeding scheme for both its regular pupils and the rainbow children who cannot afford regular meals. Slum and street children are provided with three nutritious meals a day, and the food is served and cooked by permanent staff who generally live on the premises and are on duty for the entire year. Their catering remit extends beyond the feeding scheme to include providing food for training course participants who attend the Barefoot Teacher Training Programme.

Figure 3.6.: Children enjoying their midday meal

3.7. Other Programmes and Projects

The school has a number of other programmes and projects including a work scholarship scheme and a networking project. The work scholarship scheme provides an opportunity for members of Class XI and XII who cannot afford the fees to render their services in exchange for non

fee-paying status in the final two years of their schooling. This usually involves supervising study and coaching classes containing younger members of the secondary school.

The networking programme at Loreto Sealdah, co-ordinated by the resident school social worker, Ms Teresa Mendes, is extensive. It is a way in which the school keeps abreast of developments in the NGO sector, as well as in other schools and institutions. A quarterly Loreto newsletter, "Ripples and Rainbows", is published and keeps NGO's, volunteers and sponsors in touch with the activities, values and progress of the school. Networking represents a crucial part of the school's information system, and is also one of the key ways in which funds are raised on an informal basis.

3.8. The Values and Ethos of the School

The many programmes at Loreto Sealdah are integrated by a common vision and collective set of values which have

evolved during the period of change. One of the keystones of the curriculum at the school is Value Education, which runs from Class 1 to Class X, and uses an experience-based approach to the development of values. The text used, called "We are the World", is published by Orient Longman, edited by Sr Cyril, and written in large measure by members of Loreto Sealdah teaching staff. "We are the World" makes explicit the values which the school espouses, including those related to freedom, justice, sincerity, the development of spirituality, love, tolerance, concern, contribution, service, rights and responsibilities. There is a statement of belief at the beginning of each text, which reads as follows:

We believe:

- that every child has the right to experience those great human values of freedom, justice, sincerity and love as she/he grows to maturity;

- that every child has the right to be happy;
- that every child has the right to be introduced to the spiritual element in her/his nature, which transcends the narrow barriers of religious and communal considerations;
- that every child has the right to be reared in that spirit of love, concern and tolerance which is his/her secular inheritance in India.

The programme of value education for school pupils is supported by the conduct of staff development workshops which act as a reflective tool for teachers. These workshops are conducted for two days annually, and include topics like change, risk-taking, fear, freedom and relationships. Value education is also directed at parents and guardians of pupils through ongoing communication about values in school newsletters.

At the centre of all Loreto Sealdah's vision is a visible and explicit ideology which rests on three intersecting values. Principally, Loreto challenges a fixed view of school and its structures by seeking to live out a set of values which continually challenges parents, teachers and pupils of the school to build an outward looking *community*, to be *flexible*, and to live in *simplicity*. The idea of community seeks to create both a sense of belonging within the school, and a desire to reach out to the poor and oppressed without it. Similarly, flexibility places the utmost value on people. Responding to the needs of people is considered a higher priority than the programmes, meetings or timetables which the school runs. Interruptions and disruptions are common as a result of the school embracing what it describes as the "messiness" of living among the poor. Simplicity places the resources at Loreto's disposal in the broader context of a country where 400 million people lack the basic necessities of life. It therefore stands against acquisitiveness, consumerism

and the trappings of modern life in favour of valuing people and relationships. These are the explicit values which Loreto espouses, and they may be represented as intersecting circles, as in the diagram:

Figure 3.7. The Visible and Explicit Ideology at Loreto.



The adoption of a set of explicit values is not a neutral or unproblematic exercise, especially where these values challenge dominant ideologies. The realisation of values in the life of a school is a difficult and elusive process, which may have uncertain or unpredictable consequences. The particular values which Loreto Sealdah has evolved over a period of time contain their own contradictions and problems. At best,

these values represent the will towards a 'new society' in which people rather than material possessions are valued. At worst, the values of community, simplicity and flexibility may take directions which diminish the quality of the educational experience for pupils at Loreto Day School. So, for example, the value of flexibility may be applied so rigorously that interruptions render the normal school programme dysfunctional. Ironically, the *inflexible* application of the principle of flexibility may lead to collapse and disorder within the system. It is clear that flexibility as a value contains within it inherent tensions, between rigidity on the one hand, and chaos, on the other. Similarly, the value of simplicity may be taken hostage by either materialism or asceticism, and the value of community may wrestle against the competing tensions of individualism and conformity.

For a school like Loreto Sealdah, which has succeeded in capturing the imagination of its members with a clear and transparent set of counter-cultural values, translating these

values into sound educational practice will always present a challenge. In practical terms, the school will need to balance competing tensions between, for example, modernising, organising and locking up the school library, and the goals of flexibility, simplicity and community which prioritise people above books. In the short term, the question of whether to sacrifice sound educational practice to people-centred values which favour the poor, is at issue. In the longer term, a well-organised library may be empowering to those very Rainbow children whom the school seeks to liberate from their restricted everyday world on the streets of Calcutta.



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4. Best Practice

4.1. Reflections on 'best practice'

4.2. A Set of 'Best Practice' Criteria Arising from a Study of Loreto Sealdah

4.3. Characteristics of Best Practice at Loreto Sealdah

4.4. Towards a Model of Best Practice

4.1. Reflections on 'best practice'

The orthodox literature on 'best practice' identifies excellent schools as those whose notable achievements include academic progress, the development of sound personal and

social values, quality relationships between pupils and teachers, achievements in the sporting or cultural arenas, good resourcing, and the constant search to lead the way in education by striving to improve performance in all of these areas (DES, 1977; Gray and Wilcox, 1995). Beyond these performance indicators are crucial dimensions related to a school "knowing where it is going and what it is about", that is, having a visible and explicit ideology or overarching goal which is understood by all and becomes part of the collective will of the school (Gray & Wilcox, 1995, p. 19; Handy & Aitken, 1986, p. 17; Rudduck, 1991). The more powerful the goal in terms of its larger significance, its ability to challenge while still being feasible, the more it will galvanise school members in quest of its attainment (Bradford & Cohen, 1984, cited in Handy & Aitken, 1986). In the literature on education in the developing world, 'best practice' is often defined as a 'quality' issue, where the fundamentals relate to *efficiency* (making better use of available resources); *relevance* to the

needs and context of learners, and what has been described as *something more*, that is, the indefinable of taking education beyond efficiency and relevance into the realm of values (Hawes and Stephens, 1990, p. 22).

Alternative perspectives on 'best practice' tend to draw a closer relationship between schooling and society, and implicitly ask the question: What is education for? The very notion of schooling as a taken-for-granted exercise, somehow delinked from the bigger issues of society like democracy, freedom, equality and human rights or conversely, exploitation, oppression, and inequality is questioned by these analyses (Postman and Weingartner, 1969; Freire, 1972; Meier, 1995). In searching for a model of 'best practice' which embraces both the quality issues of the nineties in the form of good academic results and personal/social development, as well as the critical human rights issues of the day, one is looking for a model that brings together equity and quality, rather than making them mutually

exclusive ⁶.

⁶ "...to dichotomise equity and quality is a massive abuse of truth", Meier (1995, p. 67).

What is unique about Loreto Sealdah is its ability to straddle these two forms of 'best practice' simultaneously. The school measures well against conventional criteria such as the academic results in the West Bengal Exam Board public examinations, where more than 50% of Year XII pupils attain a first class pass annually, while a proactive concern for social justice is the keystone of the school programme. Even more interesting is the school's ability to defy the logic that social class really counts in the success or failure of a school (Bernstein, 1971, 1973; 1975; Meier, 1995, p. 97). The question for the researcher interested in good practice must be how the school is able to ensure good academic standards with a non-selective intake and a non-competitive

ideology. What is distinctive about the values, the school ethos, the teaching and learning, the teachers, the learning materials, and the culture of the school that promotes learning in spite of its flouting conventional selection and social class norms?

It is to these questions that the next section will turn.

4.2. A Set of 'Best Practice' Criteria Arising from a Study of Loreto Sealdah

Evidence collected at Loreto Sealdah points to several principles and practices in the school's functioning which contribute to its standing as an exemplary school.⁷ Out of these principles and practices, six criteria of best practice have been devised, which may be applied to other contexts. These are not independent criteria, but rather represent an interpretation of the data collected from Loreto Sealdah and secondary sources on best practice. The six criteria are

phrased below as questions:

- Is the **teaching and learning** stimulating, motivating and challenging?
- Is the **curriculum** appropriate to the needs and context of learners?
- Are the **resources** used imaginatively and to best capacity?
- Are the **relationships** between all the members of the school community open, productive and relatively happy?
- Does the school make explicit the **values** upon which the entire educational process is based, thereby contributing to a shared vision and purpose?

- Does the school make a contribution to society which is **beyond** the norm?

⁷ These are expanded upon in the following section (4.3).

While a detailed examination of each of these criteria in relation to Loreto Sealdah is beyond the scope of this small-scale research project, it is worth recording brief observations about the criteria. The following table suggests how the criteria have arisen from research data collected at the school:

<i>Six Criteria of Best Practice</i>	
<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Research Data</i>
<i>Teaching and Learning</i>	Primary school uses an activity-centred pedagogy and local resources. A variety of methodologies are used across the school.

Pupils appear to be stimulated and engaged. Child-to-child tutoring in rainbow and rural projects encourages reflection on teaching methods. The context of learning is stimulating, with the use of extensive display work. Good results achieved in public examinations. Pupils are challenged to understand social, economic and political issues of the day.

Curriculum

Life skills education (banking, crafts, vocational, personal and social development) is highly developed, as is value education. Relevant community, regional and national needs are integrated into the curriculum, which is also responsive to the experiences and resources that children bring from home or the streets. The curriculum exposes pupils to a breadth of life experience.

Resources	There is a creative, multi-use of resources, for example, a roof terrace converted into a school for rainbow children is also used as a night shelter and wash-room; a covered porch is used as the school hall, a dance classroom, an after hours TV room, and a blood bank for donors; the playground houses Calcutta Rescue ambulances; regular pupils are used as a teaching resource in rainbow, rural and Sealdah Railway Station Platform school.
Relationships	There is a regular principal-parent newsletter. High levels of transparency exist between principal, staff, parents, and pupils. Authority is dispersed ensuring greater freedom and responsibility for teachers, administrators and pupils. The school

	atmosphere is one of sharing, trust and celebration.
<i>Values</i>	There is an explicit programme of value education for pupils and value-related workshops are conducted with staff. The statement of the three key values occurs in newsletters and public assemblies. The school community appears to share a common purpose and sense of direction, based on experience, the development of spirituality, and value education.
<i>Beyond the norm</i>	There is a successful integration of middle class and poor children. The school emphasises a rights culture, social justice and the option for the poor, and stands against materialism. Pupils are exposed to, and in relationship with the poor. The structure and purpose of formal schooling is

redefined. Co-operative values appear to triumph over competition.

4.3. Characteristics of Best Practice at Loreto Sealdah

4.3.1. Shared Vision

4.3.2. Freedom and Responsibility

4.3.3. Change and Stability

4.3.4. A Sense of Wonder

4.3.5. Meaningful and Challenging Goals

A second way of analysing best practice in the school is through distilling particular characteristics which a school exhibits. The advantage of this approach is that it begins to construct an explanatory basis for good practice. If the characteristics Loreto Sealdah exhibits in its daily life and functioning contribute to best practice, then the identification

of these characteristics begins to construct a possible model which may be adapted to other settings. In this section, each characteristic will be discussed in turn, with an attempt to build up a chain of evidence from various data sources. Finally, these characteristics will be represented in a summary diagram.

4.3.1. Shared Vision

A manifestation of best practice is the extent to which stakeholders within a school understand and share a common vision. There are a number of factors which contribute to a shared vision at Loreto Sealdah, not least the fact that the school's ideology is visible and explicit - *flexibility* and *simplicity* in service of *community*. The vision is undergirded by a belief in the value of human life and its profound spiritual significance. Value education for pupils, staff transformation workshops, public assemblies and newsletters to parents all contribute to the construction of this shared vision. Most

significantly, the practice of the school in its programmes of outreach makes visible and tangible this vision, and engages the commitment of the school community. At the same time, the extent to which it is co-owned and experienced by different stakeholders allows the vision a dynamic quality, and it therefore escapes the peril of becoming a dogma. Within the shared vision there appears to be a freedom to critique, to reflect, to refine and to re-invent according to the vision-as-it-is-experienced.

One of the marks of a shared vision is the passionate commitment of key stakeholders to it. So one has statements of intent from the co-ordinator of the Rainbow School: "I'm excited about it, I'm thoroughly involved in it - it fires me up. I would kill anyone who put a stop to it, I'd kill to keep it going. That's me." At the same time, passion is tempered by reflection: "There is sometimes a loss of faith among children who teach. They need affirmation that what they are doing is significant. Is it really working? Is it really worthwhile? Does it

make a difference to the quality of life of these [street]-children?" (Ms N. Bir, Co-ordinator: Rainbow Programme, Interview, March 1998). Similarly, the Barefoot Teacher Training Co-ordinator asks the question: "Why can't we reach out further? Can I go and teach in a state, train teachers, touch millions - touch as many children as possible?" Yet the vision has also been tempered by the making of mistakes, and refined as a result: "My first training programme was such a flop... I learnt so much from these people and some of them are so creative" (Ms L. Gomez, Coordinator: BTTP, Interview, March 1998).

The principal of the school acknowledges that passionate leadership is an essential ingredient of radical transformation: "[it is essential] to have a principal who believes **PASSIONATELY** in justice and equality and is prepared to take the necessary steps to bring them about" (Sr Cyril, 1997, p. 103). Passion is seen in what she describes as a "sense of outrage" at the unequal life chances of Indian

children: "I mean nobody's bothered and as I say there's no public outrage and outcry" (Interview, March 1998). The product of passion is action:" The principal told the parents: "If I can make Mathematics compulsory, I can also make compassion compulsory" (The Telegraph, 1993, p. 11).

Passion spawns a 'can-do' attitude among teachers, administrators, parents and pupils alike. The confidence of pupils that they can make a contribution is seen in their taking ownership of the programmes of which they are a part. While they acknowledge that they are "proud" of Sr Cyril and the school, they affirm that they are not teaching rainbow children out of compulsion: "it's not like she tells us to do it... we want to help other people, and allow children on the streets to get a chance to achieve" (Class 7 Pink, Taped Discussion, March 1998). Similarly, an administrator expressed her claim to the vision: "You will see tomorrow when Sr Cyril is away, how the school carries on, because we all believe in it... it is not dependent on her being here." The 'can-do' attitude of staff

extends to the stretching of resources way beyond their conventional capacities. Creative imagination turns buildings into endless possibilities for fulfilling the shared vision of the school: "What we can do with the kind of facilities we have is endless, just endless" (Sr Cyril, Interview, March 1998)

Clearly, a shared vision does not come about without passionate leadership, a sense of ownership, the development of shared core values, and the encouragement of personal investment in aspects of the school life. A shared vision presupposes a level of responsibility and freedom being devolved to members of the school community, and the ability to allow the vision to develop, grow and be redefined in the light of experience. Nurturing a shared vision also requires time and attention to relationships within a school community. In this case, many of the programmes which exhibit the vision have taken years to evolve.

There are also practical dimensions which contribute to the

fulfilment of a shared vision. For example, the ideal of teaching streetchildren has been realised through a major reorganisation of the school timetable to enable regular pupils to be present for the child-to-child teaching. Work Education periods have been used to this end. Similarly, staffing has needed to be adjusted to accommodate the vision in the case of the BTTP, the Rural Village Programme, the Rainbow School and other school projects. For the vision to be translated into reality, these practical mechanisms have had to be devised in a flexible and enabling way. Beyond this, has been the necessity for a certain baseline of resourcing which keeps the school functioning while at the same time extending the parameters of schooling beyond the purely academic.

4.3.2. Freedom and Responsibility

A second manifestation of best practice at Loreto Sealdah is linked to the high levels of freedom and responsibility granted to members of the school community. On the one hand, a

context of trust and good faith has been created whereby administrators, teachers and pupils are given the freedom to take action and make decisions, while on the other a climate of accountability and expectation exists within which freedom is exercised. The exercise of freedom and responsibility is a powerful capacity-building tool, as staff members in particular are given greater and greater opportunities to use their initiative and develop their leadership potential. This also encourages risk-taking, the making of mistakes, and a certain fearlessness among the staff. The result is that authority is dispersed and delegated through the school organisation, in a way which allows it to function in a relatively democratic way. While to some extent the exercise of freedom and responsibility has issued out of Sr Cyril's leadership style, it is also the serendipitous product of her outside commitments as a result of Loreto Sealdah's reputation as an outstanding school. 8

8 Loreto Sealdah was the recipient of the UNESCO NOMA prize for spreading literacy in 1994. Sr Cyril is regularly called upon to speak at international conferences, to deliver workshops on values education and staff transformation nationally, and to contribute to national and regional policy fora.

Sr Cyril sums up her leadership style in response to a question about the 'can-do' attitude of staff members:

"First of all, everybody is left alone. I don't see my role as being a policeman for checking... everybody's expected to be professionally competent and professionally ethical so that they will do their work without supervision... how can they train the girls in the proper use of freedom if they are like glorified schoolgirls - at the same time I have certain checks and balances whereby I know

what they're doing... in an atmosphere like this they themselves will come [to me]. (Sr Cyril, Interview, March 1998).

Teaching staff are viewed as having leadership potential, so that "the general feeling is that anyone on the staff could be a vice-principal -they all have that capacity". At the moment there is no vice-principal at the school, and instead there is a reliance on co-ordinators to perform key leadership functions. In view of Sr. Cyril's absences from the school, she feels that staff are "taking more and more things into their own hands... not in the wrong sense...but in taking responsibility".

Decision-making is encouraged in preference to inertia: "whether it's right or wrong, take the decision" (ibid.), she encourages the staff.

The recruitment of staff supports the exercise of freedom and responsibility. In recruiting new members, Sr Cyril looks for flexibility, "a certain kind of intellectual freedom, a capacity to

think critically", and initiative: "I don't want to recruit 'yes people', who just simply say "Yes, Sister, Yes, Sister" and who sit tight till they're told what to do - I look for initiative also - you know, so that people can do something without constantly having to be programmed" (ibid.).

The dispersal of authority and delegation of responsibility permeates key areas of the institution. In the Rainbow School, for example, regular pupils tell the co-ordinator when they feel she is wrong about a particular pupil's learning programme: "...they're almost operating as colleagues - yes, they are colleagues". Part of the vision is the empowerment of the regular pupils to take the reins of the school: "I would like there to be a day when the children themselves run it, and I only come in when there's a problem" (Ms N. Bir, Co-ordinator: Rainbow Programme, Interview, March 1998). Similarly, the BTTP co-ordinator works with trainees to discover better ways of teaching and learning, as appropriate to the rural context: "I want to sit with some of you and think

what are the different possible ways we can do these same ideas, but how we can deliver it in your place, with your material..." (Ms L. Gomez, Coordinator: BTTP, Interview, March 1998).

Perhaps the most startling exercise of freedom and responsibility is granted to the least powerful group within the school hierarchy. Speaking of the 'rainbow' children and their relationship to the institution, Sr Cyril has been quoted as saying: "it is not a boarding school where they are regimented but a home where they are free to be themselves" (Asian Age, 1997). Elsewhere, she has expressed faith in the streetchildren's ability to act responsibly, countering fears of vandalism, theft and destructive behaviour, arguing that "such problems only occur when the children are kept away and the door slammed in their face" (The Telegraph, 1993). My research journal entry on the subject captures a sense of the open-door policy which the school operates:

In many ways, yesterday was the most interesting day I spent at the school, because Thursday is the school's day off, and with the termites and worms, I was burrowing away in the archives of the school all day long. The school is never shut because it is home to the streetchildren, and nothing whatsoever appears to be locked. The TV stands in an open area, with kitchen staff and kids alike watching India play Australia at cricket, the computer room is open, the staff room, complete with piles of reports is open. Sr Cyril's office, home to all the teddy bears and puzzles, is open, as is the entire administrative section, medicine chest -you name it. All day long, Barak, Rheka, Shenaz and various other streetchildren wandered into my workspace to say hello, to wash their sores in dettol, to ferret about for toys, to answer the school phone. One donor from America rang, and a little girl called Pinky

answered it before I could get to it - "Sister, she not here.... What your name?.... Oh, that's a pretty name... Are you coming to visit?" It's an amazing place. (Research Journal, 26 March 1998).

The exercise of freedom and responsibility at Loreto Sealdah presupposes a number of supporting conditions. Firstly, there needs to be a core of reasonably well-trained teaching staff who adhere to and understand professional ethics and standards. Secondly, the principle of accountability needs to be understood as a key component of freedom and responsibility. Even within highly democratic structures, the abuse of freedom does not go unchecked. Thus, a streetchild who persistently steals or takes drugs is warned, cajoled, nurtured, and finally punished. Similarly, an under-performing and unprofessional teacher may be helped, encouraged, cautioned, or as a final and drastic sanction, sacked. Accountability operates to check the abuse of freedom and responsibility. A third prerequisite of the exercise of freedom

and responsibility is a climate of trust. Members of a school community need to trust that the principal is fair and trustworthy, and acts only in the best interests of the school community, its teachers and pupils. An aspect of this trust lies also in the extent to which a leader delegates and disperses authority without drawing it back. There is a certain amount of 'letting go' and risk-taking that occurs in the creation of trust within a school organisation.

4.3.3. Change and Stability

A third manifestation of best practice at Loreto Sealdah is the way in which the tension between change and stability is managed while a climate of change is created within the school. Stability rests on the fact that the school is part of a 150 year old tradition, that it belongs to a wider religious community, that teaching and administrative staff remain in post for great lengths of time, and that the school has some explicit and timeless values. In addition, the school has

created a sense of community where members feel that they belong and have a certain 'ownership' over the school programme. Within this context of stability, a process of continuous, multi-faceted and dynamic change is happening. Over a twenty year period, the school has doubled its intake, embraced poor streetchildren, created a school-within-a-school, embarked on village outreach programmes, and launched an extensive para-teaching programme. The vision of the school includes the construction of a night shelter which can accommodate as many as 300 streetchildren, and the establishment of both an institute for teacher training and an adult literacy centre.

In reflecting on the fact that middle class parents in particular have been "strangely acquiescent" and "do a lot of quiet support" to help poorer children, Sr Cyril points to the fact that the changes at Loreto Sealdah have been incremental. In retrospect, the school has undergone a radical transformation, but a study of newsletters to parents over the

nineteen year period of her principalship shows that most changes have been negotiated and refined in a step-by-step fashion. As a result, people most affected by change have gradually come to terms with the implications of the shifts the school has undergone, and resistance to change has been minimised: "People change when they are secure in changing" (Sr Cyril, 1990).

Another key supporting feature of the change initiatives has been their responsiveness to the context and the needs of those who live and work outside the gates of the school. Regular pupils at the school have come into contact with streetchildren and slum-dwellers on their journeys to school, and have responded with concern and action. So, for example, a group of Class IX and X students initiated a move to survey the needs of street and station-platform children in 1985. In response to their survey, a small beginning was made, which consisted of the streetchildren coming to school for one afternoon a week to play and learn literacy and

numeracy. Since then the streetchildren programme has been formalised and institutionalised, and has become integral to the functioning of the school. At the same time, great care has been taken not to lose the flexibility and spontaneity of the initial idea, and every effort is made to reinforce the notion that the Rainbow School is a 'drop-in' institution that functions differently, albeit in parallel to the regular school. The Rainbow School may thus be regarded as an example of evolutionary change in response to community needs, where the guiding principle has been to "start small with a few pupils, and to let it grow naturally" (Sr Cyril, 1994).

A further feature of change at Loreto has been the extent to which members of the school community participate in the process of change. Investment in the change process by as many stakeholders as possible enables change to become a deep-seated rather than a superficial phenomenon: "People change when they are involved actively in the change process" (Sr Cyril, 1990). Thus, teachers and pupils who

participate in the rural village programme, and the primary staff who lead Barefoot Training courses are invested in the entire process, and are therefore more likely to contribute to the evolution of change, and ultimately to sustain its momentum.

Change is neither neutral nor value-free. At Loreto Sealdah, many of the changes over the last nineteen years have flown in the face of prevailing values. Instead of competition, ambition, academic prowess, and individualism, the school has stressed co-operation, service, holistic development, and community. While there are a number of factors which have enabled the school to move against the spirit of the age, including the strategies of incremental change, responding to needs, and wide participation, there are **three** further particularly formative characteristics of the changes that I would stress.

The first is that all the changes have operated within the

context of changing values within the institution. Explicit, personal, and prayerful engagement in value education has enabled pupils in particular to reflect on and make choices about what values they wish to pursue in life. Changes in the school's structure, purpose and functioning have been supported by personal and corporate reflection on the values of simplicity, sharing and social justice. The value education course which pupils pursue is oriented towards the personal, the affective and the spiritual within the broader context of social, political and economic issues. Staff transformation workshops follow a similar approach.

The second formative characteristic concerns the nature of the change process at Loreto Sealdah where action often goes hand-in-hand with planning for change. This dynamic of action and planning has enabled a sophisticated set of planning strategies to develop, whereby action, planning, and reflection are often in constant interaction. As a result there is greater commitment to the change process as participants

are already embarked on the journey, as it were. There is also more risk-taking, as the change process is without a fixed and predetermined outcome, and can therefore be altered en route. This may lead to a continuous refinement of change initiatives in the light of the context, the mistakes made, and the overall experience of change. Conversely, the seeming chaos and disorder of the change process may be disturbing for participants.

A third, and perhaps most important formative characteristic of change at Loreto Sealdah is the fact that most changes happen in relationship to people, with their particular problems and circumstances. The dynamic of relationship between, for example, rich and poor, regular and rainbow pupils, rural and urban, is an inescapable imperative of the change process. As Sr Cyril observes, the converse is also true, that where no relationship exists people are indifferent:

"...the real reason why we continue to have children

blocked out from education and adults who are illiterate is not lack of resources but lack of interest. *There is no relationship between those who have and those who have not.* In fact, although no-one would admit it there is always the inner fear that relationship will mean sharing and there will not be enough to go around. So unless those who are deprived can make an impact on those who are not, and convince them that it is in their interest to do something or in some way to touch their conscience, nothing will move because of the lack of interest of those who have education and who are enjoying the benefits of it in terms of income and quality of life" (Sr Cyril, 1995, *my italics*).

Elsewhere, Sr Cyril has argued that sharing and learning from others provides the dynamic and commitment for real change. Within a school context, change is expressed either

through "cosmetic action", or through "integral action", whereby real change is sustained by virtue of it being embedded in the life-blood of an institution. Change which nests in an institution in this way is the product of relationship, as can be seen from the "integral action" column which the dualism between cosmetic and integral action sets up (Sr Cyril, 1997, p. 103) (below):

Just as a shared vision and the exercise of freedom and responsibility presuppose certain conditions existing within a school, so change requires a supportive climate. Many of the factors and conditions which support change have already been mentioned in the report. These include a sense of ownership, a shared vision, teacher autonomy and confidence, the backing of the institution, even where mistakes are made, a passion for the goals of change, responsiveness to the needs of the context, wide participation, and a flexible approach. Yet, even within a climate which is broadly supportive of change, more than the

ideal conditions need to exist for change to be initiated, gain momentum, and finally take root in the form of "integral action".

The process of change at Loreto Sealdah follows a particular cycle which appears to nurture initiative, momentum and sustainability. This process begins with **risk-taking**.

Examples of this can be seen in the genesis of the streetchildren and the 'option for the poor' programmes respectively, where in the former, regular students were allowed and encouraged to survey local needs on station platforms and in the surrounding streets of Calcutta, and in the latter, a target of 50% non fee-paying students was set. The risk of alienating parents was high in both instances. Not only were middle class children interfacing with 'dangerous' elements of the city, but the institution was proposing to alter the basis of its privileged intake at some financial risk.

Similarly risks were taken in setting up a Barefoot Teacher Training Programme which runs counter to the theoretical and

academic emphasis of regular teacher training courses. The risk of failure was presumably high where regular staff were being withdrawn from their regular classes to teach rural para-teachers their skills. Not only could there have been criticism from 'regular' parents, but the staffing of the BTTP was presumably also a risk. Risks such as these require vision and a sense of urgency which makes them worth the cost.

<i>Cosmetic Action</i>	<i>Integral Action</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An added activity which therefore can be dropped at will. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An integral part of the curriculum as important as Maths.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Done at the school's convenient time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Done at the client's convenient time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving small numbers of older children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving all, at least from age 10 upwards.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children get material recognition like certificates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children work because of other's needs and are paid in joy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children see the clients as less than themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children form relationships and see the clients as equals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children see themselves as doing something great. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children see themselves as doing something necessary.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school involves itself for reasons outside itself, eg. because social work is required in the curriculum, others are doing it, it's a good cause etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school involves itself because it has undergone an inner change of heart which makes it impossible to do otherwise.

The second phase in the change cycle is the beginning of reflection and refinement. This is where **mistakes** are made,

and participants return to the drawing board to assess their strategies. In the case of the BTTP, for example, the first courses seemed inappropriate to the needs of rural teachers, and therefore required redefinition. The integration of rich and poor children in the school always runs the risk of making the mistake of reinforcing the differences and divisions that exist in society. Some regular pupils are able to analyse the conditions of poverty that prevail in a way which enables them to act as equals, while for others, the streetchildren are the product of "laziness" or lack of initiative. Inevitably, some child-to-child tutoring contains the risk of condescension and in some cases may disempower the very rainbow pupils that the school is seeking to empower. There is no doubt that mistakes are part of the change process, and that some of these mistakes may be costly.

Where a real change agenda is pursued, mistakes bring about **collaborative reflection**, as a way of rescuing the best of the change initiative. This is the third phase in the

change cycle. In the case of the BTTP, collaborative reflection was manifest when it was found that urban strategies for developing teaching aids were inappropriate. As a result, ideas about the use of authentic and local resources were developed, such as the use of chillies as counters for numeracy, instead of bottle-tops. This third phase of the change cycle leads to what may be described as contextualisation.

Contextualisation happens where the change idea has been redefined by a process of collaborative reflection. The fourth phase in the change loop enables change to take root in context in an integral and appropriate way. An example of this has been in the development of alternative curricula and methods for streetchildren, drawing on their own context and experience, rather than orthodox narratives, nursery rhymes and whole class type teaching. So for example, one-to-one tutoring is more suited to the needs of streetchildren whose attention spans in groups are limited to begin with. Similarly,

games and stories involving street life, such as hawking, gambling, famous movie stars and survival skills, are incorporated into the curriculum. The change cycle continues as further risks are taken in re-inventing aspects of the innovation, often by trial and error. The diagram overleaf illustrates this process.

4.3.4. A Sense of Wonder

A fourth manifestation of best practice that the school exhibits may be described as a 'sense of wonder'. It contains the idea of creativity, imagination, curiosity and excitement. It is also about a quality of grace that pervades the school. It is as though rubbing shoulders with the poor, the homeless, the disabled and the marginalised has influenced members of the school community to look further than the narrow confines of their own class, religion and culture and to see a world beyond.

Figure 4.1. Conditions Supportive of School Change

The casual observer will notice that every wall and pillar in the school contains visual reminders of the world beyond. Planets decorate one pillar, an array of colourful shapes another, while the long trek up to the fifth floor which houses the Rainbow School is punctuated with display boards that pupils from different houses and classes change every week. But the sense of wonder extends further than visual signs of creativity to the excitement in many of the pupil and staff narratives about life at Loreto Day School. So, for example, pupils remarked to me that the school was unusual because it "helped other people", it embraced "all the customs, all the castes, all religions" and that, as a result, they were "proud" of Sr. Cyril who had pioneered many of the programmes in the school. The excitement of a barefoot teacher trainer was also evident as she spoke of the use of local experience and resources in storytelling:

So we started, you know, with storytelling. In each group, stories came out which were so much, you know, rustic, like children playing in the fields, falling into the pond, going to the village market, then working in the rice fields -this was so different from Goldilocks and the Three Bears! And then I said "Yes, this is what I want!", and the plastic beads [used in the city] turned into stones and flowers, and we were making colours from the hibiscus flowers, black from charcoal, yellow from turmeric.... (Ms L. Gomez, Co-ordinator, BTTP, Interview, March 1998).

One key aspect of the sense of wonder which pervades the school is the emphasis on process rather than product within the functioning of the school. This is most clearly demonstrated in relation to the school's approach to examinations, which are viewed as part of a much broader set of educational goals and activities. Emphasis is placed on

rewarding effort, and pupils' corrected exam scripts are returned to them so that they can try again after reflection and conscientious application. The usual frenzy and tension which accompanies exam time is notable by its absence in the school. In fact, pupils are encouraged to participate in leisure time activities and outings during exam time. ⁹ Pupils themselves treat public exams with a certain amount of jaundiced humour, as excerpts from an essay in the newsletter by a Class X pupil indicate:

Class X means confronting the nine-headed dragon which is the Madhyamik examination... knees knocking with fright we await our fate. We don't dwell upon the examination - that would drive us to nerve-wracking despair - we only think about the post Madhyamik period. That will be the time of fun and laughter, of feeling the delightfulness of approaching adulthood. It will also be the time to set

new goals by the light of the ideals so lovingly nurtured in us by our school through all these years. That in no way means we are not happy now. We have indomitable spirit. Nothing can subdue us, not even the Madhyamik examinations breathing menacingly down on us. We remain the 'enfants terribles' of the school. We, the irrepressible and impossible Class X (Basu, D, Ripples and Rainbows, July 1996).

⁹ On my last visit, pupils from Class 5-10 were writing exams. On their non-exam days, many went to Nico Park Amusement Park for part of the school day to participate in sporting and other events.

Sr. Cyril's newsletter to parents also lays stress on education as a 'life-oriented' experience rather than a dull and meaningless exercise in memorising for exams: "Education

should be more life-oriented than book-oriented. We need to develop the intellectual capacity of our children by helping them to learn how to think, rather than make parrots out of them by forcing them to memorise without understanding (ibid., 25/9/79). A breadth of educational experience is offered to pupils, including leadership courses, visits to museums and city sights, and occasionally even the chance to see a good film: "There's a very beautiful children's film "The Dark Night is Over" at the Globe Cinema... we have booked the hall for our junior school..." (ibid., 15/3/85).

A second aspect of the sense of wonder at Loreto Sealdah is the focus on celebration within the school. The kinds of celebration which are part of the school calendar include Domestic Staff Day, when pupils take on the usual role of the domestic staff, cooking and serving a meal for them, as well as putting on a concert as entertainment. Christmas is celebrated with a party and concert, and is preceded by the packing of a thousand parcels for streetchildren and the poor.

Sr. Cyril's feast day, in commemoration of her profession of vows, is also celebrated with prayers, cards and a concert:

The office was brimming with cards and well-wishers. Children brought their widow's mite, a potato, or a small flower or maybe a tiny sweet but it was all straight from the heart. Later Sr Cyril treated the students to sweets and the staff to a delicious luncheon but the highlight of the day was the Rainbow Circus. It was very creative and colourful - Tigers, Lions, Monkeys, Elephants, Clowns... we had them all dancing... (Ripples and Rainbows, September 1997).

Celebrations also include the achievements of various programmes and people within the school, and in particular, the Rainbow Children are the cause of great celebration whenever they achieve in any special way.

A sense of wonder is also nurtured by the approach to teaching and learning which the school espouses. Both the Barefoot Teacher Training Programme and child-to-child tutoring in the Rainbow School encourage high levels of participation in curriculum development, and the use of different teaching methodologies. This has some influence on the kind of teaching and learning which takes place in the school, encouraging more activity-based and group teaching than would otherwise be the case. The Value Education course is also innovative and participatory, avoiding sterile 'lecturing' methods in favour of problem-solving, reflection and discussion. In these ways, a sense of wonder is more likely to be preserved for pupils over the duration of twelve years of education.

4.3.5. Meaningful and Challenging Goals

The manifestations of best practice to which this report refers would have little resonance or reality without the final

indicator of good practice, that is, the setting of meaningful and challenging goals. A shared vision, freedom and responsibility, change and stability, and a sense of wonder all acquire their value from this central notion, that pupils and staff are being challenged to participate in what they consider to be a substantial and worthwhile endeavour.

The goals of service, social justice and building a new society are at the heart of Loreto Sealdah's philosophy. At the same time, as an educational institution, the school demands commitment, hard work, time, and levels of academic and pedagogical excellence which are normally expected in schools with a narrower focus. The challenge to pursue outward looking goals like social justice alongside the maintenance of standards of excellence within the school, is huge. Yet, in large measure, the school is able to hold together its apparently disparate goals and expectations.

Loreto Sealdah exposes teachers, administrators and pupils

alike to the hard issues of poverty in India. The challenge of exposure is accompanied by practical strategies which make it possible for everyone in the school, from the richest to the poorest, to make a contribution. In this sense, exposure renders a meaningful challenge, not only to the rich, but also to the core values of the whole community, and to their capacity to think imaginatively about solutions. The following excerpts from the keynote paper delivered by Sr. Cyril at the "Education for All" Conference held in Calcutta in 1995, sum up the challenge:

The regular school child learns at first hand what real destitution is and will be less likely to dismiss the poor as a nuisance when she holds a position of power later on, and if the regular child is herself poor, then she learns the need to work for her own community and is challenged to share rather than climb up the social ladder and be lost to her own people... (Sr Cyril, 1995, p. 5)

Our creativity is constantly challenged to find ways and means of stretching resources to reach as many as possible (ibid., p. 6).

The poorest child challenges by her very presence in the school, value judgements based on money or power (ibid., p. 7).

At the same time, the challenge is not limited to social or political causes and the values of justice. Letters from the principal to parents stress the value of hard work and application to studies: "With average intelligence and regular application any girl can cope not only with her studies but with the other equally important formative processes to which her educational programme at Loreto exposes her. This letter is not a signal to cut down on your daughter's co-curricular activities but just a request to see she develops regular study habits, if she has not already developed them (Letter to Parents, 16/9/85).

A feature of the high expectations of pupils, teachers, pastoral staff, co-ordinators and administrators at Loreto Sealdah is that the school functions at multiple levels. It is an orthodox school, a night shelter, a training institution, a 'soup kitchen', a home, a drop-in school for streetchildren, a place of pilgrimage for foreign visitors, and a residence for para-teacher trainees. The sheer volume of 'trade' that the school engages in means that it is a busy place. But the values underpinning its various endeavours are generally accepted by members of the school community. In addition, the idealism and pragmatism of the school programmes have captured the imagination of many pupils and staff, and the relationships which have resulted have touched many hearts.

It would be naive to assume, however, that the entire school has been galvanised into action by the goals that Loreto Sealdah has set up. For some, school remains a place of dusty books, boring lessons, tiffin tins, and hours of sitting at uncomfortable wooden desks in the sweltering heat of a

Calcutta summer. There is apathy and an almost feigned boredom with the school's outreach programme among a sector of the pupil population. No doubt, this is reflected throughout the system. However, the quality of setting meaningful and challenging goals within a school remains a feature of best practice, whether or not the particular goals established resonate in the hearts and minds of every pupil and every teacher.

4.4. Towards a Model of Best Practice

A visual model of the characteristics of best practice has been constructed out of the findings of a case study within a particular school. According to the data, these five key characteristics overlap and intersect in a dynamic way, both supporting and constraining one another. Moreover, the central characteristic of best practice, on which all the other key features depend, is the establishment of meaningful and challenging goals. Without this pivot, the model of best

practice becomes superficial and is not able to give substance and meaning to a school's efforts and endeavours. The goals of a school have to make sense to a community and be worthwhile in its estimation in order for all the intersecting characteristics of best practice to be engaged. Moreover, these goals have to extend a school community *beyond the norm* in order for aspirations of excellence to develop.

Figure 4.2: Towards a Model of Best Practice



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5. Critical Issues

5.1. Rival Hypotheses of Best Practice

5.2. Challenging Common Myths about Schooling

5.1. Rival Hypotheses of Best Practice

One of the key issues in case study research is the extent to which the findings are generalisable beyond the particular setting of the case. Yin (1994, p. 10) distinguishes between the goals of scientific experiments, which seek to generalise to populations and universes, and case study research, which seeks to expand and generalise theories. The value of case study research lies in its ability to identify, analyse and express theoretical propositions which may have resonance in other settings. The rigour of this process would not be complete without a counter-analysis of rival hypotheses about

best practice which have emerged during the course of the investigation. In this section, there is some attempt to answer five counter claims about best practice which have arisen out of the research. These claims are that best practice at Loreto Sealdah:

- *rests on a leadership model which can best be described as a **'personality cult'**;*
- *is dependent on massive **financial resources**;*
- *is made possible by high levels of **conformity** among Loreto educated, Loreto trained staff;*
- *is dependent on having **highly trained** staff;*
- *is a **religious phenomenon**.*

There is no doubt that each of these rival claims contains within it a grain of truth. However, the significance of the claims, taken individually or together, is that they may be used to invalidate a more generic theoretical model of best

practice which has the potential for application across a wider body of schools in India. The five counter-claims are all open to being used as conservative, change-resisting, and limiting theories, enabling their proponents to dismiss Loreto Sealdah as a unique but irrelevant institution in the broader context of India. In contrast, the analysis and explanatory framework which this report contains has used research evidence to suggest that a more complex and sophisticated process of 'doing' best practice has emerged out of the school's experience. It is therefore important to examine briefly each of the claims in turn, and suggest why they cannot be used to dismantle a more generic theory of best practice, even where they contain elements of truth within them.

The 'Personality Cult' Theory

There can be no doubt that Sr. Cyril has been the pioneering spirit of many of the changes at Loreto Sealdah. Children and

staff refer to her as a "visionary" and a "spiritual" leader of the school, while she herself acknowledges that she is the "ideas person" behind many of the innovations which have led to a form of best practice at the school. Beyond the school gates Sr. Cyril has become a high profile and celebrated educational leader in national and international circles, adding weight to the theory that her personality is central to the vision of the school. At first glance, then, it appears that the theory of a powerful personality driving and sustaining change in the interests of best practice, has some credibility. Certainly, in a broader context of educational torpor and inertia (see Shukla and Kaul, 1998; Shotton, 1998), the theory that powerful and vocal leaders are necessary to 'kickstart' the system, has merit. However, there are a number of countervailing tendencies within the school which suggest that a different interpretation is possible.

Firstly, in discussions and interviews with coordinators,

teachers ¹⁰, administrative staff and pupils, all avowed that they now 'owned' the changes, and that these would continue without the presence of Sr Cyril. These actors and participants are so involved in the programmes and projects of the school, some of which they themselves have initiated or refined, that they feel that they 'own' them. Moreover, in the short-term, the school continues to function effectively without Sr. Cyril for a significant part of the school calendar while she is away at conferences, workshops and meetings. Capacities have been built across the system as a result of these absences. All these factors evidence the dispersal of authority which has been referred to as a feature of best practice in the section on freedom and responsibility (4.3.2).

¹⁰ Except for one teacher who said that the programmes would all collapse without Sr Cyril's presence.

A second way of countering the view that a 'personality cult' is at play within the school, is that a number of other schools send members of their staff to Loreto to observe and identify aspects of the school programme which may be adapted or translated into their own school contexts. The system, values and generic characteristics within it, rather than the personalities at the school, are the features that those who would model their practice on Loreto Sealdah take away. Significantly, when asked whether the ethos and practice of the school would be maintained when her term as principal came to an end, Sr. Cyril affirmed that the staff and pupils would carry the programmes and projects forward, provided that the new leadership was supportive. This points to the fact that leadership is both an important *and* a transferable commodity in the production of best practice. It points away from the notion of a cult of personality driving best practice.

The Financial Resources Theory

The financial resources theory is a similarly compelling way of explaining away best practice at Loreto Sealdah as the product of healthy bank balance sheets. There is certainly some validity in the argument that "good education costs more than bad" (Beeby, 1986). There can also be no doubt that the school has more money and resources than many other schools in India. However, there are three interesting counter-arguments to the financial resources theory. The first is that a substantial number of independent schools in India with similar resource bases have not put their schools to as extensive or as good use. The second is that Loreto Day School has used whatever resources it has imaginatively, extensively and powerfully in the interests of best practice. There are lessons for all schools, worldwide, rich and poor, in the boundary-breaking strategies which Loreto has adopted to maximise its resources. The principle of maximising resources in response to need has driven the creative stretching of resources to capacity, and beyond. The

third argument is linked to the second, and posits that the resource question is more about human agency and the values of a school, than about how much money a school might have. The fact that Loreto plans programmes, projects and buildings in advance of the funding, and takes financial risks in the interests of its outreach to the poor, for example, suggests that the school is driven by its values agenda, rather than its bank balance.

The Conformity Theory

This theory argues that the staff at Loreto are predisposed to the values of the school before they enter it, by virtue of the fact that they have been educated and trained in the same or other Loreto institutions. To some extent, this may be true, in that Loreto Schools have long exercised a preferential option for the poor, and are part of a particular religious and cultural tradition. However, the direction that Loreto Sealdah has taken in the last twenty years would take many a seasoned

Loreto nun by surprise. It is an atypical Loreto School in that it has radically altered the definition and direction of traditional Loreto Schools, while still remaining in the fold. Arguably, the teachers on the staff do conform to a set of shared values and a collective vision, but the express recruitment policy of the school to have critical and independent thinkers on the staff, and the explicit intention to tolerate mavericks and critical ideas, must provide a corrective to conformity.

The Theory of Highly Trained Staff

This argument rests on the premise that for best practice to happen the staff must be highly trained professionals. To some extent, the fact that most of the primary teachers have been trained at Loreto Teacher Training College, one of the foremost training institutions in India, must have an influence on the quality of education at Loreto Sealdah. There is certainly a core of well-trained staff at the school. But the

school's willingness to recruit beyond this group, and even to recruit a barefoot trainee from its own para-teacher training programme to assist with teacher training, is evidence of a different philosophy at work. The staff development which takes place through the Barefoot Teacher Training Programme and the Rainbow School, where orthodox methodologies and theories may hamper learning rather than assist it, has meant that the school is more interested in creative thinkers who are willing to work by trial-and-error, than teachers whose qualifications give them a set of certainties which may, in fact, prevent learning.

The Religious Phenomenon Theory

This theory maintains that the ethos, values and programme at Loreto Sealdah are God-inspired, and by implication, only possible within schools with a religious foundation and tradition. Certainly, the spiritual dimension of the school is compelling, both as an example of Christianity at work, and

as an example of building an ecumenical community out of a multi-faith group.¹¹ Whilst the school has been described by outsiders as "a place of grace", and there is a vision, a compassion and a generosity which mark it out as a special place of god-likeness and godliness, it is also a place of tremendous human agency and action. Sr. Cyril's maxim that she would "make compassion compulsory" at Loreto Sealdah flies in the face of orthodox theology with its notions of prayerful reflection, revelation, and response. It exemplifies the pragmatic, matter-of-fact, and hands-on approach to poverty and social justice that the school has taken, out of the view that love is central to spirituality, just as action is central to love. To some extent, then, Loreto Sealdah may be seen as a school which is responsive to circumstance, and whose vision includes a high level of exposure to the realities of life in India, and a 'can-do' attitude.

¹¹ The majority of pupils at the school are Hindu.

There are Catholics, Protestants, Sikhs, Jains and Muslims on the school roll, and among the school staff. There are also atheists and agnostics.

5.2. Challenging Common Myths about Schooling

A second way of exploring the critical issues which this case study has highlighted, is through representing and confronting some common myths about schooling. In this instance, the practices of Loreto Sealdah are used as a reflective tool, whereby notions of schooling and best practice in general may come under scrutiny. A set of common myths, represented overleaf, reflect some of the concerns discussed in Section 5.1 on rival hypotheses of best practice. Most refer to the values, activities and practices which have been discussed more generally in the report. As such they represent a kind of critical summary of the case study analysis.

COMMON MYTHS THAT LORETO CHALLENGES

1. Schools need massive physical resources to educate properly.
2. Low teacher: pupil ratios contribute to effective teaching and learning.
3. Social class and academic achievement are related.
4. There needs to be a ladder of promotions to motivate teachers.
5. Teachers are too overloaded and stressed to take on new and challenging roles.
6. Strangers and stray dogs on the premises will trash the property.
7. You can't run two schools within one building, at the same

time.

8. You can't run two schools, a soup kitchen, a night shelter, and a teacher training programme within one building, at the same time.

9. Teachers always grumble.

10. Children need to be protected from the harsh realities of life.

11. Good fences make good neighbours.

12. Competition is the best way to motivate pupils.

13. You must know where the money is coming from before you make the plan.

14. Principals get stale if they stay in the same job in the same school for too long.

15. You can't change the basic structure of how a school operates.

16. Freedom is dangerous. Teachers and pupils will often take advantage of it.

17. Rich and poor children mix like oil and water.



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6. Implications of the Study

The implications of the study for education policy and practice in general have been referred to in the executive summary. These relate to the following issues, namely that:

- education has both a moral and a technical dimension, therefore making it important for policy to address itself both to technical aspects of education, and the less tangible moral and human aspects such as quality and equality;
- devolution of authority within schools leads to 'ownership' and facilitates change;
- planning and action which is responsive to local needs is more likely to succeed;
- fixed ideas about the structure and purpose of schooling inhibit change;

- flexibility and human agency are possible under sound leadership and with reasonably well-trained teachers;
- resources can be stretched.

In addition, the research has sought to construct a model of best practice based on the realities of a particular school. This model proposes five characteristics which are key to best practice in a school, namely:

- a shared vision;
- the exercise of freedom and responsibility;
- a balance between change and stability;
- a sense of wonder;
- meaningful and challenging goals.

Insofar as the theoretical propositions of the model may be refined and tested, it would be useful for DFIDI Education

Projects Office, British Council Division, to identify other examples of best practice in both rural and urban settings of India, and to conduct a follow-up study which seeks to apply and adapt the findings of this study accordingly. A second way of refining and testing the model would be to return to Loreto Day School, Sealdah, and workshop aspects of the paper with validating groups within the school. This would deepen the case study analysis within its particular context, and add rigour to the findings by refining them. In addition, for Loreto Sealdah, it would represent a useful exercise in staff development, and a 'return' for their willingness to participate in the research.

In the longer term, a model of best practice may be used to inform project and policy developments with which DFIDI EPO are involved, and thereby to influence the direction of policy and practice.

reality of that school, and how are these characteristics manifest?

- What factors contribute to best practice in a school?
- What influence does the historical, socio-cultural and resource context of the school have on the culture of the school?
- Why does 'best practice' reside in a particular school setting, and what generic principles of application might be derived from a case study of such a school, its specific context notwithstanding?

b) The documentation and analysis of a model of 'Barefoot Teacher Training' which Loreto Day School, Sealdah, has developed.

- What are the critical issues in para-teacher training generally, and as part of a working school's programme, particularly?
- How has the Barefoot Teacher Training Programme evolved and developed?
- What is the way forward in terms of monitoring, evaluation and refinement of the programme?

Methodology and Sampling

The research design was based on the principles of applied case study research (Yin, 1994). The tools of qualitative research, for example, semi-structured and conversational interviews, observation and documentary analysis, were used as the basis for constructing a picture of the research setting from multiple sources. In practice, data was collected using a checklist of observations and questions addressed to

different informants, situations and documents. Extensive fieldnotes were made, and both interviews with key informants and group discussions with pupils were audio-taped. The researcher visited the case study site on three separate occasions for a period of twelve days in total.

The use of multiple sources contributed to building up a chain of evidence related to the research questions, ensuring that the study demonstrates linkage between the research procedures used and the concepts under study, that is, construct validity. The evidence on which the findings are based also underwent a level of cross-checking or triangulation as a result of the use of using multiple sources. Moreover a level of checking of the findings with informants was built into the research process as a further means of validating the evidence, as draft reports were circulated to key informants and colleagues as a way of corroborating the evidence. Clearly, researcher interpretation is intrinsic to the process of data analysis and reporting the findings. However,

interpretation takes place within the context of analytic strategies such as an iterative process of building explanations to ensure the rigor of the findings (ibid., p. 111) as well as on-going dialogue with key informants. In the final analysis, the critique of subjectivity in case study research is answered by the transparency of the process, and by its own realistic set of claims:

Concealment not subjectivity is the crime. The case study addresses the critique of subjectivity by presenting findings, procedures, basic data, and its own frame of reference for public scrutiny and attack. It does not claim the status of "truth" or the "last word"; it simply invites confrontation by a better analysis" (Millar, 1983, p. 135).

Similarly, the scrutiny of documents related to the process of change in the school over a nineteen year period (mainly newsletters for public consumption), and the BTTP, used

transparent critical and interpretive procedures as a way of assessing the accuracy, representativeness and credibility of the written sources, insofar as this is possible.

Sampling procedures of informants included reputational sampling (Johnson, 1994) where contact was made with those who were considered important to the process of change and innovation by others. A combination of random and convenience sampling of regular and 'rainbow' pupils, teachers, administrative staff, and BTTP trainees was also used.

Outline of Research Design

Research Activity	Key Informant/s	Purpose
Semi-structured	Sister Cyril (Principal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To elicit shared principles, values and practices from key

interviews

Ms Laeticia
Gomes (BTTP
co-ordinator)

staff;

Ms Sanghita
Mullick (BTTP)
Ms Shushila
(BTTP asst.)
Ms Teresa
Mendes
(Social Worker
and Editor of
Newsletter)

- To develop a list of characteristics present in teaching staff and at the school which contribute to best practice;

Ms Nandita Bir
(Rainbow
School Co-
ordinator)
Ms Dippanita
Biswas (Asst.

- To examine processes at work over a period of time through the lenses of key staff;

	on Rainbow Programme)	
	Head of Rural Village Child-to-Child Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To construct an accurate picture of the school from multiple perspectives.
Random conversation interviews	Teachers Regular pupils Rainbow pupils Administrative Staff BTTP trainers and trainees	To generate a wider and more critical perspective on the school vision from informants who may have lower investment in the change process than the key informants.
Focus group discussion	Class 7 Regular Pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To challenge and probe taken-for-Granted understandings of the child-to-child programmes in order to assess their longer term

		educational value.
Observation	Class teaching Rainbow School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain a more holistic picture of the school's activities;
	Village child-to-child programme BTTP sessions on-site BTTP sessions in the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish aspects of best practice which have not been articulated in interviews;
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To analyse the gap between the vision and the reality (where it exists) and thereby to cross-check the principles of best practice as espoused against the realities of various teaching situations.

Documentary Analysis	Newsletters (1979-1998); Staff Development material;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To place the change processes in the historical context of the school;
	BTTP documentation; Newspaper and magazine articles;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish critical moments in the evolution of the school's vision;
	'We are the World' Value Education textbooks;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To elicit principles for managing change over a long period of time;
	Journal articles and resource packages on Loreto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To document the development of the BTTP programme;

	Programmes; Literature on change, innovation and best practice in schools.	• To consult a wider body of sources in the interests of cross-checking the findings of the research.
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Publication and Dissemination of Findings

The findings of the research will be published and disseminated in a number of ways.

Firstly, an interim report issuing out of the preliminary visit to Loreto Day School, Sealdah, will be made available to Ms Barbara Payne (DFID India), Dr Tom Welsh (DFID British Council India), and Sister Cyril (Loreto Day School, Sealdah) for comment and discussion. This report will constitute a working document on which the final report will be based. Secondly, a final report will be published for DFID British

Council India for wider distribution as appropriate. A third means of dissemination of the findings will take the form of a workshop



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