

## Elsewhere in India

I visited my close friend and a Director of SEWA Mirai Chatterjee. SEWA is one of the largest unions in India that works with economically disadvantaged women who are engaged in the informal economy. SEWA has almost 1.8 million members. SEWA provides numerous services to its members, most importantly training on organizing to demand their rights.



I watched two fascinating discussions in rural villages where SEWA health workers gathered with village women to talk about whether they are accessing their benefits and if not, why not. Women organize to ensure that everyone has access to the health care programs promised by the government. In addition, I watched a class led by a SEWA

worker about reproductive health. The 60 girls, ages 11-12, had paid close attention to the instructional device (an apron that a peer wears to show exactly where all the reproductive organs are located). When Mirai quizzed the girls about what they had learned it was clear that the collaboration between SEWA and government schools was effective.



This particular school was in a makeshift location since the regular building was being renovated, but students didn't seem to mind learning on dirt floors or under a tree. What they wanted was to be in school. The next rural school was located in an adequate physical space and the teachers were very excited about the award they had just won for banking. The teachers had collaborated with parents and convinced students that instead of spending their coins on sweets for a designated amount of time, they should create a bank and save the money and earn a school trip.



Many in India are critical about teachers and government schools and the union. The teachers' union seems to have a stranglehold on its members and to be a teacher means that you are also organizing local elections. While I'm not sure how different that is from the states the magnitude seems much broader.

Later I gave a talk at C.N. Vidyavihar campus, which is a large institution of many different schools (sports, education, arts, an English school, a middle school and a technical college, to name just a few). This oasis in the middle of busy Ahmadabad serves both young people from that city and also many rural poor who board there. I shared my experiences of creating a school with arts at the center. I also discussed some of the challenges of developing a school culture in which we try to implement democratic practices. Mirai translated the talk to Gujarati. Questions from these local educators abounded about special education, integration of fine arts and academics, teacher training, to name just a few of the topics.



CN Vidyavihar is a remarkable place and so interested in how others are implementing successful educational practices. I felt such potential for more intercultural exchanges. I hope I can return some day.