

## Four days of Heritage

My first day began with meeting the core leadership team. Then off to grade 3 exhibitions where students were presenting their research on the Indian state that they had studied. This included food, culture, arts and traditional dress from that region. The 60 different student exhibitions were fantastic. I began to learn about the geography, languages, customs and traditions that make up India. I might have done quite well on a quiz after this exhibition on the differences between Goa, Rajasthan and Punjab. Certainly the students would have!



Next were the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade exhibitions on Healthy Choices. They were performing plays and dances for the 4 and 5 year olds about their research into the importance of exercising, eating well and avoiding junk food. Each group had a different slant yet all incorporated some kind of acting, movement, props, songs they had written. The little ones in the audience sat in rapt attention. At the end of the presentations the teacher asked about what had been learned. Hands shot up all over since students were eager to explain.

I also met with elementary teachers to share strategies about working with children in developmentally appropriate ways. We also explored ways to incorporate more arts and music and movement into the curriculum.

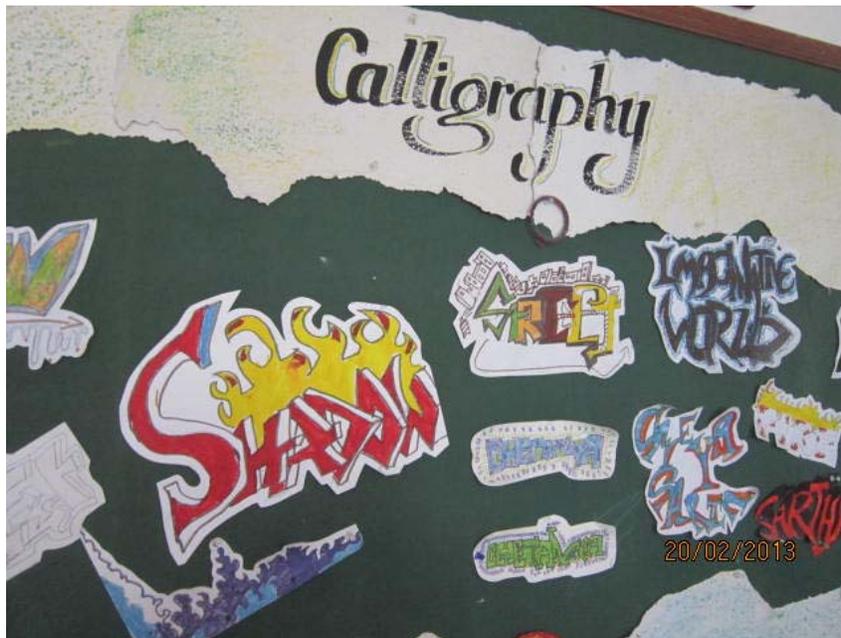
Heritage has an Enrichment Center for special needs students. This appears to be quite unusual for private schools. I was very impressed at the level of professionalism in the Center. They also push to get as many students as possible to have some mainstreamed classes.

Day two included more visits to classrooms, more meetings with teachers, and students. Everyone I met was extremely open with me about the challenges and successes at the school, and very committed to making Heritage the best school possible.



Day three involved a full morning with the art department. The facilities were impressive. Students have the opportunity in visual arts to take paper making, sculpture, stone carving, printmaking, fabric design and dyeing, among other offerings. The department is staffed by a full-time head and at least 11 part-time teachers and artisans. Many of the artisans do not speak English, which is the language of instruction in the school. They also are not highly educated by formal school standards. Students are exposed to traditional arts and *new* arts such as graphic design and media studies. The same range offering exists in music with

opportunities to study tabla, slide guitar, sitar, etc. In dance, students can study classical Indian dance. I had a wonderful lesson.



Theatre is also a strong component of the arts department. Students regularly put on plays and musical performances. As with many arts administrators and teachers in US comprehensive high schools, the arts teachers feel quite marginalized. They don't have the students for enough time and they want to be more involved with planning and collaboration in other classes. "We have the resources and facilities, but not the time with the kids!" was a frequent lament. As the students explained the system to me, the nature of

high-stakes testing and college admissions leaves you hard pressed to continue taking high-level arts classes and not be prepared for your tests.

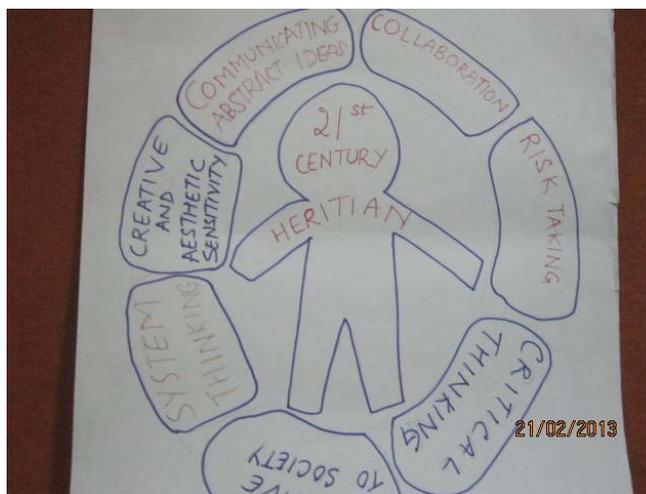
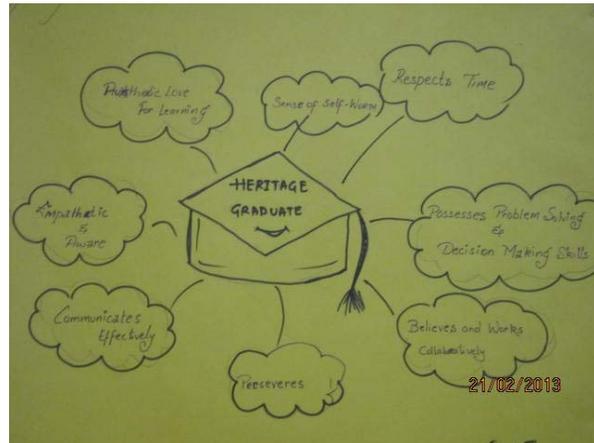
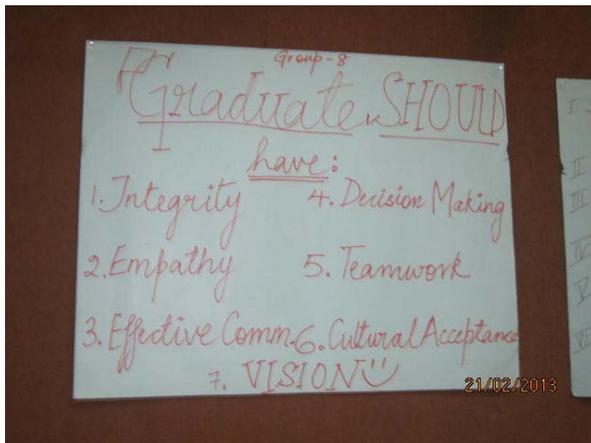


Day four brought me to the request to discuss my experiences with leadership and building leadership teams, and with democratic schools and leadership. Most remarkable to me was Mani's ability to be vulnerable – as founder and also as principal for four years – in front of his leadership team. He was eager to step back and empower his team and let them truly run the school. With the team we had a free-form discussion that focused on the differences between freedom and democracy, punishments and rewards, different ways to engage students, and how to keep clearly articulating mission and vision. As with many

institutions, questions about communication and decision making also surfaced. For example, how do you hear from all constituent voices and still be clear on decision making processes?

Heritage wants to continue to be a school that takes risks and is innovative but the pressures of high-stakes testing and the need for students to do well on those tests often overwhelms all other goals. Again, my job was to listen and help them go from good to great.

I worked with all 45 of the senior teachers (high school) and helped them imagine and begin to articulate ideas for their habits of the graduate. Together we asked what Heritage stands for as a school. How would you know? I discussed the power of a unifying framework and asked the faculty to imagine what that might be in their school context. We looked at BAA's current Habits of the Graduate, or RICO and we also looked at Studio Habits. We began discussions about what Heritage teachers thought were the most important habits for their graduates to possess.



Of course this kind of work takes much longer than the three hours I had with the teachers. Yet in their feedback the faculty was overwhelming positive about having begun the

process of asking hard questions about their practice, their school community and their students and families. The work of coming up with a unifying framework that everyone can buy into must always be done in one's political and educational context. I am hopeful that the faculty and staff of Heritage will be able to map out what their school stands for beyond scores on a test. (photos of workshop)

Some of their feedback from the workshop:

- + Spend more time on these 8 habits and deepen our own understanding... separate habits, values and purposes (I know you said 8 is too many)
- + Follow up and version 2... you asked lots of questions and not enough time for answers... We need you back.
- + Session too short... I would have liked something finalized so that there was some closure—the tempo has been built
- + More concrete ways to build 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills into curriculum
- + Many questions unanswered. Can this be done when I have 30 in a class?
- + How to collaborate with colleagues in my teaching?
- + How might I introduce more arts?

I was enormously impressed with the genuine desire to learn and work together exhibited by the teachers at all levels. I am excited about the role that Heritage might play in shaping the future of education in India. I am grateful for the opportunity I was given to work at this exciting school with such a committed administration and faculty.