

BOULDER-LHASA SISTER CITY PROJECT

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Lhasa Education Delegation Exchange in Boulder 20-24 February 2011

On 20-24 February 2011, Boulder-Lhasa Sister City Project (BLSCP) hosted an education exchange in Boulder with a delegation from Lhasa, Tibet. The delegation was:

Mr. Chunda - Deputy Director General of Education Bureau of Lhasa Municipality
Ms. Feng Xingjuan - Principal of Experimental Primary School of Lhasa Municipality
Ms. Nyima Tsamchuo - Principal of No.2 Primary School of Chengguan District of Lhasa Municipality
Luoluo (sixth-grade boy) - Student of No.2 Primary School of Chengguan District of Lhasa Municipality
Peyang (sixth-grade girl) - Student of No.2 Primary School of Chengguan District of Lhasa Municipality
Ms. Sonam Dekyi - Interpreter of Foreign Affairs Office of Lhasa Municipality

The purpose of the exchange was to consult on school management, teaching methods, and curriculum research and development. Lhasa educators observed classrooms and met with Boulder educators to discuss their lessons, curriculum, and teaching methods. Lhasa students participated with Boulder students in classrooms.

The delegation resided at Missions House Lodge in Chautauqua Park at the base of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Built in 1911, the superbly renovated Missions House Lodge features a spectacular great room with a stone gas fireplace, fully equipped kitchen, eight guest rooms with private baths, and a screened-in front porch. The arts & crafts interior and furnishings provide a warm, luxurious setting. BLSCP members Bill Warnock and Carrie Hartman resided with the delegation at the lodge during the exchange.



When the delegation arrived at the lodge, Luoluo proclaimed, "It's beautiful!"
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]



Nyima Tsamchuo, Luoluo, Bill Warnock, Sonam Dekyi, Chunda, Peyang, Carrie Hartman, Feng Xingjuan (left to right) on Flagstaff Mountain
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

Feb 21 afternoon

The delegation ate lunch at China Gourmet restaurant and then enjoyed some sightseeing and shopping. They visited Flagstaff Mountain, Sister City Plaza at Boulder Municipal Building, Pearl Street Mall, and the Chocolate Factory.

Feb 21 evening - Welcome Dinner

BLSCP and Tibetan Association of Colorado (TAC) co-sponsored a Welcome Dinner for the delegation, which featured several choices of catered Tibetan food and a few song & dance numbers by the TAC Cultural Troupe, composed of ten youths. The dinner was held in the Grand Assembly room at Chautauqua's Community House. Around 70 BLSCP members and friends, including about 25 Boulder-area Tibetans, welcomed the delegation with speeches, gifts, khata, and conversation. Welcome remarks were given by Bill Warnock, BLSCP President; Susan Osborne, Mayor, City of Boulder; Suzy Ageton, Council Member, City of Boulder; Lorrie Shepard, Dean, School of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder; Tenzin Jigme, President, Tibetan Association of Colorado; and Jigme Tenzin, Vice President, Tibetan Association of Colorado.



Mayor Osborne offering gifts to Peyang and Luoluo.

[photos courtesy: Carrie Hartman]



TAC Vice President Jigme Tenzin offering khata to Mr. Chunda.



TAC Cultural Troupe performing traditional Tibetan dance.



Peyang and Luoluo with CHOICE student hosts
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

Feb 22 morning - Platt CHOICE Middle School (hosted by Boyd Brown)

The visit went very well. The students from Tibet became more comfortable and interactive as the visit progressed. They spent part of their time alone with CHOICE students touring the building and attending classes and part of their time with the delegation adults learning how CHOICE operates. Even though the language barrier made communication difficult, as is often the case, kids will overcome such challenges with energy and nonverbal commonalities.

The delegation adults spent time touring as well, along with designated time in conversation with the CHOICE Team and Platt's principal, Dr. Kevin

Gates. This conference time enabled the CHOICE Team to give a detailed overview of their program and allow the Lhasa delegation an opportunity to ask specific questions regarding their own priorities. As is usually the case, there was far too little time compared to the need for information.

The Lhasa delegation, the staff of CHOICE, and Platt's Administration appeared to be very pleased with the visit.

Feb 22 afternoon - Casey Middle School (hosted by Lisa Wertz)

The sixth-grade students very much enjoyed organizing a welcome reception for the delegation from Tibet. Here are samples of notes that the sixth graders at Casey wrote to the visitors:

Coco: "I feel very special that you came all the way to America to see us."

Patricia: "I really like the fact that you came here to see how we study - maybe next time you can come and meet our families."

Erin: "I was surprised that the Tibetans knew so much English. I hope next time there will be more students."

Angie: "I liked learning how to say 'hello' in Tibetan."

Sam: "I really liked getting cards from you. - Thanks"

Gage: "Your culture is so cool."

Josh: "I am honored to have you flown halfway across the world to visit us. I appreciate how nice you were to us."



Meeting sixth-grade students
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

A story about the visit was published in the February 23 issue of the local newspaper, the Daily Camera.

Feb 22 - Dinner at the home of Stanley Goldberg



back: Feng Xingjuan, Chunda, Nyima Tsamchuo, Sonam Dekyi (left to right)
front: Luoluo, Peyang



Chunda, Bill Warnock, Carrie Hartman (left to right)
[photos courtesy: Carrie Hartman]



Stanley explaining a book of Boulder photos given by BLSCP to Mr. Chunda.

Feb 23 morning - Nederland Elementary School (hosted by Johanna Gangemi)

Nederland was very pleased to be included in the visitation schedule. Nederland's teachers were welcoming to all, and the Lhasa delegation especially warmed to the younger (K, 1, 2) children. Music, art, and physical education are universal to most schools. The comfort level went way up when everyone



Meeting second-grade music students
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

climbed on the gymnastics equipment and did a few tricks and had an impromptu concert with the second graders.

Since time was short, the Lhasa delegation was only able to tour the building and visit classrooms. However, everyone enjoyed the visit. An article ensued in the March 4 issue of the local newspaper, The Mountain-Ear.

Feb 23 morning - Gold Hill Elementary School (hosted by Boyd Brown)

This visit was the shortest time-wise but very interactive. After a short time of program description, everyone sat in a circle. Interactions between the students of Gold Hill and Lhasa were facilitated through interpretation and clarification by the adults. This process was fun and enlightening.



Interactions among students
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

Feb 23 - Lunch at the home of Boyd Brown & Johanna Gangemi



Johanna receiving khata from Mr. Chunda
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

Feb 23 afternoon - Whittier International Elementary School (hosted by John LeClair)

Principal Becky Escamilla and John LeClair guided the delegation on a building tour. They visited Cindy Bigelow's first-grade class and listened to a description of their garden studies. They followed that with a visit to the fifth-grade instrumental music session and then moved upstairs to visit Breida Geesaman's second-grade class. The delegation asked questions about postings of student work throughout the classrooms and hallways. They then visited the kindergarten wing of Whittier and looked closely at Jennifer Shepard's Art classroom and her display of student art throughout the school. One Whittier parent, Bambi Wineland (Tibetan born), joined the tour group and answered questions from the delegation about the school.

The delegation was invited to a question/answer session in the staff lounge. They were offered tea, fruits, and cookies. About ten faculty members, including the school principal, were present. Questions centered on the length of school days, size of classes, the elements of required curriculum, and structures of local and state and federal governance in our educational system.

Gifts were exchanged between the delegation and the faculty. The faculty was especially gratified to provide the two student delegates with a selection of books in English. The culturally significant gifts brought by the delegation will be put on display in the school library with the many other artifacts reflecting Whittier's international outlook.



Peyang and Luoluo receiving books from the school
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

The school enjoyed the visit for the graciousness and openness of the delegation. The faculty and students look forward to future contact with BLSCP and the new friends they have gained in Lhasa.

Feb 23 afternoon - University of Colorado School of Education

This visit was organized by Dr. Lorrie Shepard, Dean of the School of Education, and Dr. Guillermo Solano-Flores, Professor of Bilingual Education at the School of Education. In combination, Ms. Sonam Dekyi and Ms. Chao Wang, a doctoral student from the school, acted as interpreters. Eight professors of the school, one professor from the School of Education and Human Development, University of Colorado Denver, and about 20 graduate students and invitees attended the 90-minute session.



Dean Lorrie Shepard (far left) greeting the Lhasa delegation.
[photo courtesy: School of Education]

During the first half of the event, members of the Lhasa delegation asked the professors questions about education in the U.S. and, more specifically, about topics related to curriculum design, bilingual education, and special education. An important part of the discussion was the realization that an important difference between the American system and the education in Tibet is the level of centralization of decisions concerning

curriculum. Unlike many countries in the world, in the U.S. a great deal of the decisions concerning curriculum and educational policy are made at the state, school district, and school level.

During the second half of the event, professors and students asked members of the delegation various questions concerning the preparation of teachers and the assessment of students. An important part of the discussion was the realization that student failure is, to a large extent, a social construction. Unlike Tibet, in the American education system student promotion and retention decisions are made almost exclusively based on standardized test scores without taking into consideration contextual and social factors that may shape the performance of students on tests—which brings with it the implicit assumption that success or failure is the sole responsibility of the students.

Both the professors and students from the school were impressed by the sophistication of the reasonings used by the two students from the delegation, when they were asked to share their impressions from their visits to schools in Boulder.

The event was a success. It contributed to promote among professors and students from the School of Education an enriched view of the challenges and strategies relevant to education in the world. It also helped both parties to identify some of the commonalities and differences in the education in Tibet and the U.S. Most importantly, the event contributed to strengthen the relationship of cooperation and friendship between Lhasa and Boulder.

Feb 23 evening - Dinner at the home of Kevin & Elizabeth Martin

During the dinner conversation Mr. Chunda invited Bill Warnock, BLSCP President, to lead a group of Boulder-area professors, teachers, and students to Lhasa for a reciprocal education exchange on 4-8 July 2011.



Elizabeth Martin exchanging gifts with Mr. Chunda
[photo courtesy: Carrie Hartman]

Later on Wednesday evening at Missions House Lodge, Mr. Chunda explained that Lhasa Municipal Education Bureau would like to form two or more sister school relationships under the existing structure of the Boulder-Lhasa sister city relationship. The Lhasa delegation recommended the following pairings:

No.2 Primary School of Chengguan District of Lhasa Municipality - Whittier International Elementary School
Experimental Primary School of Lhasa Municipality - Platt CHOICE Middle School

During our exchange in Lhasa in July, Mr. Chunda hopes that he and Bill will be able to sign a memorandum of agreement on the formation of these two sister school relationships. He would then propose that during 2012 we conduct exchanges, both ways, of teachers and students from the four schools.