Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools

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An Educational Journal

This is a journal on education brought out annually. It is an anthology of writings by educators, teachers, and thinkers exploring a vision of education in its many dimensions—philosophy, psychology, classroom experience, curriculum, nature and environment, and contemporary issues. It lays a special emphasis on J Krishnamurti's principles of education, and will be of use to teachers, parents, educational administrators, teacher-educators, and anyone interested in education.

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Dear Reader

Kindly share this Journal, after your perusal,
with a school nearby or a school you know,
or a teacher who you feel will enjoy this,
so that it reaches more educators.

Many thanks
The Editors

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT WISDOM

In our search for knowledge, in our acquisitive desires, we are losing love, we are blunting the feeling for beauty, the sensitivity to cruelty; we are becoming more and more specialized and less and less integrated. Wisdom cannot be replaced by knowledge, and no amount of explanation, no accumulation of facts, will free man from suffering. Knowledge is necessary, science has its place; but if the mind and heart are suffocated by knowledge, and if the cause of suffering is explained away, life becomes vain and meaningless....

Information, the knowledge of facts, though ever increasing, is by its very nature limited. Wisdom is infinite, it includes knowledge and the way of action; but we take hold of a branch and think it is the whole tree. Through the knowledge of the part, we can never realize the joy of the whole. Intellect can never lead to the whole, for it is only a segment, a part.

We have separated intellect from feeling, and have developed intellect at the expense of feeling. We are like a three-legged object with one leg much longer than the others, and we have no balance. We are trained to be intellectual; our education cultivates the intellect to be sharp, cunning, acquisitive, and so it plays the most important role in our life. Intelligence is much greater than intellect, for it is the integration of reason and love; but there can be intelligence only when there is self-knowledge, the deep understanding of the total process of oneself.

—*The Book of Life*, 17 September

EDUCATION TO FACE THE WORLD

What kind of human being are you going to be when you go out into the world? You will have to face so many problems, won't you? Not only economic, social, environmental problems, but also problems of relationship, sex, of how to live intelligently, with great love and affection and not be smothered, corrupted by society. Here, in this school, we are more or less protected and among friends; there can be trust, we are familiar with each other's idiosyncrasies, prejudices, inclinations and tendencies, but when we go out into the world, we do not know anybody and we are facing a monstrous world.

We have to find out how we are going to meet all this, what kind of mind or intelligence is going to face this. So education becomes of the greatest importance. Education being not merely the acquisition of technical knowledge, but the understanding, with sensitivity and intelligence, of the whole problem of living—in which is included death, love, sex, meditation, relationship, and also conflict, anger, brutality and all the rest of it—that is the whole structure of human existence. No problem is something separate, all by itself. It is related to other issues, other problems, other affairs. So if we can take one human problem and enquire into it freely, then we shall be able to see the connection with all other problems.

—*The Beginnings of Learning*, p. 55

Contents

Editorial

Welcome back, dear reader, to a long-awaited issue of the *Journal of Krishnamurti Schools*. After the COVID interregnum followed by our special issue, No. 25, we are returning to our customary collection of contributions by teachers and educators from the global family of Krishnamurti schools. The joy of meeting their students face-to-face once again seems to have triggered the creative side of several teachers who answered our call for contributions to the journal. We are happy to present you Journal No. 26.

This issue starts with two pieces sent by educators who talk about the beginnings of Krishnamurti schools that were set up in Ojai, California in the 1970s and, three decades later, a fully residential one near Chennai. Gianni Garubo talks of the days before Oak Grove School was established, when Krishnamurti spoke to prospective teachers and parents on the intention of setting up a school. Krishnamurti wanted such a school to engage in the "whole movement of inquiry into knowledge, into oneself, into the possibility of something beyond knowledge, (that) brings about naturally a psychological revolution…". Gautama elaborates on how Krishnamurti's vision is meaningfully engaged and constantly played out in Pathashaala in the daily life of the children and adults. In particular, he speaks about the contextual challenges and opportunities encountered in the early years of this new school and the responses that have shaped the school's ethos.

In the next cluster of articles, teachers speak of the ways in which they engage students in the teaching and learning of their respective subjects. Parikshit Sharma tries to show why he likes his history classroom to be not "a dead space, but rather, an active and alive one", and how he and his students go about creating such a space. In a similar vein, Indus Chadha and Mallika Asirvatham look at and experience the teaching of poetry and fiction in their literature classes. Indus narrates how from being an alumnus of the Valley School to getting to teach there (with her experiences in a Teachers

College abroad thrown in) she has really been engaged in reconciling philosophy, pedagogy, and practice. Mallika gives a fascinating account of her experiences with senior students in the teaching of one novel. Students bring their own understanding of the different facets of each major character, thus facilitating rich and meaningful discussions in class. Every class becomes an experience in showing that it is "not only the novel that was the teacher, but every one of my students in the Elective English classes".

Later in the issue, Meena G shows how, in the teaching of a subject like economics that seems far removed from what Krishnamurti was talking about, critical thinking skills could help bring the issues closer. It would be possible to deal with real world problems on how the individual and society could mobilise the resources available with wisdom.

In an absorbing conversation with his colleagues at the Centre For Learning, Rhythm Parikh attempts to unravel what may be meant by 'child-centred learning'. Among many questions that they together explore is: What does it mean to be at the 'centre' in an interdependent and intricately connected world full of other living beings? Lionel Claris looks at the phrases 'alternative education' and 'holistic education', and shows us how the attempt to conflate them with Krishnamurti's vision of education is flawed. He explores Krishnamurti's educational vision and considers that 'its essence lies in its concern with an inner revolution, therefore they go far beyond the boundaries of 'holistic' education which, after all, does not even consider self-knowledge as an essential part of holistic education.'

Nina Mecagni explores the role of imagination in the learning process. She says, "Awareness of the role thought and imagination play in shaping our sense of reality can be a necessary discomfort." However, this exercise needs to go beyond restraining the imaginative faculty to quickly arrive at the 'known', which is what the brain is accustomed to doing, and come upon a more generative role for imagination. Vaishnavi Narayanan, in the first part of a long article, speaks of the myriad ways in which the teacher's presence could be an enabling factor in the life of the child. She emphasises the need for active engagement in dialogue, as well as providing the child the time and space for self-reflection.

In a moving piece, Rajani Jooju waxes lyrical over her continuing journey with a visually impaired child, a young student of hers. 'A walk in the woods' (in fact several) with this sensitive child (and other children) seems to have made 'all the difference' to them, individually and together. Sangeetha M shows how 'multiple possibilities of engaging with the class-

room space', where order and disorder alternate, happens among children of Class I.

With an unsentimental eye, Jenner J Prince shows how 'deception' among animals and insects seems to help them in their struggle for survival. While this biological trait is shared by humans, where it overflows into the realm of human social behaviour however, the situation is ambivalent. In the short run dishonesty and selfishness may help, but honesty breeds trust, from which co-operation flows, which are together central to an educational environment. Prashant Narasimhan has an interesting take on performances at school. He shows how an inherent tendency in us, fuelled to feverish proportions by the playing up of every triviality in our engagement with social media, results in the 'performance' taking over the 'process'. 'What is decidedly critical though is to find a sense of purpose and meaning in the attempt'.

Sanjay Mathur shows how a field trip from Varanasi to far away rural Rajasthan became an experience in 'Unseen Learnings' for the teachers and students who undertook this journey.

Bhaveen Sawlani and Sumitra M Gautama describe in fascinating detail the longitudinal survey undertaken by the students of Pathashaala located in rural Tamil Nadu. Beginning with the question 'How do we understand our connection with our neighbourhood?', this project took on a different colour during the recent pandemic.

Manisha Koppala brings alive the world of a young teacher in her relationship with students who would be nearer to her in age than most of her teacher colleagues. In a light-hearted but thoughtful piece, she talks about her conversations with senior students who ask her personal questions but also seek her presence as a 'listener' rather than a problem solver. She sees these occasions as exercises in self-knowledge.

In the final article V Arun asks, 'How do we engage with each student, with care and the intention of bringing about a sense of well-being?'. Also, he explores the need to help students have autonomy, so that there is no element of dependency in them.

The issue ends with a book review.

Welcome to the world of vibrant classrooms brought alive by thoughtful teachers.

P Ramesh

On Founding a New School

Pointers from Krishnamurti

GIANNI GARUBO

A new school

Krishnamurti met with some trustees of the Krishnamurti Foundation America and other friends in Malibu in 1974 to discuss starting a school in Ojai. He continued these conversations with parents, trustees, and prospective teachers in 1975. The two volumes of the book, *Unconditioning and Education*, present these remarkable dialogues, which led to the opening of Oak Grove School in 1976. Krishnamurti's vision of education is expressed in a statement about the intent of Oak Grove School, of which the concluding paragraph states:

> The whole movement of inquiry into knowledge, into oneself, into the possibility of something beyond knowledge, brings about naturally a psychological revolution, and from this comes, inevitably, a totally different order in human relationships, which is society. The intelligent understanding of all this can bring about a profound change in the consciousness of mankind.
>
> — Krishnamurti[1]

Nothing is more reflective of a society than the education of its newest members. Naturally, this is where the discussions start—how can education bring about this psychological revolution, a new mind? Education in ancient societies meant something quite different than how we usually think of it in our modern perspective. Many ancient societies were greatly concerned with cultivating the whole child. As Krishnamurti is keen to point out, our word 'school' comes from the Greek word σχολή (skholḗ) meaning 'leisure'.

1 All K quotations taken from: Krishnamurti, J., *Unconditioning and Education: Dialogues with Parents, Teachers and Trustees in Malibu and Ojai, California*. Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 2015.

Not the 'leisure' of today, where one might kick their feet up and escape through television. In the ancient sense, leisure was to have the space to learn, to inquire into the different facets of life, time spent after the physical security of having food, water, and shelter were met. This conception of education placed a heavier emphasis on cultivating the student's soul, not just making the student proficient in a trade to earn a livelihood.

Freedom from conflict and authority

While invoking the ancient conception of education, Krishnamurti enquires into whether it is possible to cultivate a *new mind*. This *new mind* is something humanity seeks, regardless of society or cultural background. For Krishnamurti, this implies being free of conflict:

> From childhood, until we die, we have perpetual conflict: wanting, not wanting, being punished, being rewarded, trying to be something, trying not to be something—this perpetual struggle. Out of that comes our violence. And therefore, no love, no affection, no consideration. (p. 158)

This conflict creates disorder; in this state of disorder, we are hurt; we suffer as individuals and as a collective society. This disorder manifests itself as violence, whether that be against others or ourselves. In our pain, which emanates from our fundamental insecurity, we find refuge in various authorities. As Krishnamurti points out, "…because I am disorderly, confused, and you seem to be orderly, therefore I respect you. I create out of my disorder the authority…" (p. 56). Additionally, our relationship with authority is complicated by function and status. Authority in function is quite necessary; those who know more about carpentry or architecture must lead construction projects. However, "…when out of that function you create a status, the status becomes the authority, not function…" (p. 57). While this may contribute to the disorderly state of affairs, the greatest degenerative quality of authority is when through ignorance, it applies to our own inner spiritual or psychological sphere. Krishnamurti demonstrates the fundamental tension between self-understanding and authority:

> …is there anyone who can teach you about inner knowledge? Only when there is no authority will you learn about yourself… Now is there any authority for inward understanding of yourself? If you have an authority for that, then you are merely following the authority, not understanding yourself… Therefore, I say, authority has its place as knowledge, but there is no spiritual authority under any circumstances. (p. 95)

One acquires the experience of the importance of authority as function, which, as previously mentioned, is absolutely necessary, both externally by example and internally through obtaining knowledge of various skills and crafts. Does the insistence, or necessity, of physical security, drive us to also seek refuge in psychological authority so that we may quell our insecurities in knowing ourselves and our place in the world? As Krishnamurti asserts early on in these discussions, "without order, there is no security. The brain can function only when it has complete security. It may seek that security in neurotic habits, neurotic ideas and so on, but it must have order, which is security." (p. 25)

The arts of listening, seeing and observing

Realizing authority's degenerative quality on the psyche, how can a school, with educators and students, be free of this? The mind can only function with complete security, so how can a school provide this? Krishnamurti says there must be, "…great watchfulness, awareness of oneself…" (p. 57) for this security and order to exist. This is where attention comes in, for the word attention, as suggested by its Latin root, *attentio*), conveys, 'to attend' or 'pay heed'. So, what is the quality of this attention? How is it to come about in both the student and the educator? When posed with this question, Krishnamurti goes into three arts—*listening, seeing*, and *observing*.

Krishnamurti suggests, "Let us find out what it means to listen to the birds, to the wind. Begin objectively and then come closer and closer: can you listen to yourself, your thoughts, your attitudes, your opinions, your like(s) and dislike(s), the whole of that?" (p. 155). The art of listening means not accepting, and not denying, and listening to your prejudices, listening to your judgments. Let us reference a passage regarding the art of seeing and observation, "It is very difficult to see the proportions of the room, the colour of the walls without bringing your prejudices in; just to see the height, the depth of the room, the colours of the books; just to look, not saying you like or do not like. Just to see! … Not only what it means to see objectively, but what it means to see inwardly."

Attention and concentration

Going further into these arts, one learns the difference between attention and concentration. When invited to attend in this way, the student begins to understand the difference between 'concentration' and 'attention'. Concentration implies giving your energy to a particular thing, to centre upon something. Whatever the subject, concentration is there, whether

grammar and spelling or a mathematical problem. Students are familiar with this, though even this concentration is new in nature to a young student. The mind moves so fast that the student must slow down to ensure they have done their work properly. But in attention, there is no centre, but a wide-awake awareness of all that is around and within. By incorporating the arts of listening, seeing, and observing, which are exercises in attention, alongside the traditional academic subjects which require concentration, the student begins to have a sense of the whole movement.

The distinction between attention and concentration parallels a debate that has rung through the ages: What is more important, the outer or the inner? In speaking about this, Krishnamurti uses the example of the commissar and the yogi. The commissar excludes the inner world in favour of the external; conversely, the yogi excludes the external world in favour of the internal. Krishnamurti says, "…we are saying that it is a total movement, that the outer and the inner is one unitary movement. It is like the tide going out and coming in." (p. 19) In this way, the student begins to see, not in a conceptual way, but through insight, the non-fragmentary nature of life. For Krishnamurti, "Insight demands a totally different kind of mind, which is non-mechanistic."

Observing without the observer

When we examine these three arts that Krishnamurti proposes, we see that each relies on using a perceptive faculty without analysis. In many of his talks, he asks the attendees if they can listen or look at something without naming it, without the network of memory arising. Likewise, for observation, he speaks of the type of observation where the observer is the observed, without a sense of an observer who is separate. He asks, "When you see a statue, there is a distance between that object and the observer. The observer who sees through the eyes— vision, light, reflection. Now, is there observation in which the observer is the observed?" (p. 155). He further says, "It matters enormously how you observe; whether you can observe yourself without the observer. That means there is no division between the observer and the observed. Then that means no conflict." (p. 157).

Putting knowledge in its right place

In one of the dialogues from this collection, an educator expresses a challenge of bringing a non-mechanistic discipline of self-inquiry into the classroom:

> I experience the problem as a dichotomy. I experience a division when I am guiding students, trying to lead them towards searching for themselves when I need to disseminate knowledge. To achieve the confluence of those two is what I am searching for. How does one do that?

To this question, Krishnamurti responds:

> The dichotomy is the division between using knowledge and being free from knowledge. The meaning of the word 'art' is to put everything in life in its right place… Learn the place of knowledge and learn the freedom from that, then there is no dichotomy, there is no division. (p. 87)

Can there be an atmosphere of responsibility?

Krishnamurti frequently asks whether in this new school an atmosphere of responsibility can be present. There seems to be a major hurdle here: how do you instill this sense of responsibility without reward and punishment? It is not readily apparent how responsibility is connected to the three arts examined above. Perhaps it is a litmus test, so to speak, for the culture that emerges from cultivating the arts of listening, seeing, and observing. If such an atmosphere can be created, perhaps then and only then, can there be a radical transformation in consciousness, so that from the earliest ages of children there is not a deep reinforcement of being motivated out of the narrowness of self-interest which dominates our world. This feeling of responsibility is then not a choice, for if it were a choice, it would still be within the realm of desire, punishment, and reward.

Choice and conflict

Krishnamurti highlights this, when he asks, "When do I choose? When I am confused. When I am clear, I do not choose." (p. 73) Do we see that confusion arises out of conflict? In discussing the purpose of education in the context of this new school, Krishnamurti said, "I would help my students to find out how to live without conflict because to live without conflict is the most marvellous thing on earth. It means no division in oneself, no contradiction in oneself." (p. 156). The last sentence of that quote rings out to me, *no division in oneself, no contradiction in oneself.* No division, no contradiction, and no choice. The significance of this statement is complex, and its consequences ripple out like the water of a deep pool.

Socrates and Krishnamurti: Some parallels?

The statement reminds me of a similar philosophical statement I encountered during my undergraduate work. In Plato's dialogue *Protagoras,* Socrates claims, "No one goes willingly toward the bad."[2] According to Socrates, a

2 Plato. *Platonis Protagoras*. Translated by James Adam and Adela Marion Adam, Cambridge University Press, 2013. (Lines 358d)

person never chooses to act poorly or against his better judgment; therefore, actions that go against what is best are simply a product of ignorance of what is good. I believe there is a connection between what Krishnamurti points out with his notion of 'cessation of choice' and Socrates' denial of *akrasia*, the Greek word that more literally can be translated as 'lacking command'. The importance of this connection is to highlight the divisive nature of choice as it relates to desire. When Krishnamurti says there is no choice without conflict, which is division and thus illusory, my understanding is that Socrates would say there is no *akrasia* (failure of the will). Where they meet is over the fundamental ignorance, which is an illusion, with respect to what is. We may believe intuitively that *akrasia* (acting against our better judgment) does exist in human conduct. However, one could be skeptical of this, when one perceives that the dichotomy between the observer and the observed is illusory. Perhaps the intuitive feeling of *akrasia* comes in after the fact, in the way Krishnamurti describes our movements away from anger by reasoning justifications or administering admonishments to suppress the feeling of *what is.*

The elusive quality of *what is*

Now you may be thinking about how Krishnamurti often asks his audience whether they, "have the energy to go into all this?" One might suppose that such a question suggests *akrasia* on the part of the audience. The suggestion is that while many people suspect the illusory nature (ignorance) of their inward and outward securities, they do not pursue 'what is', as doing so will leave them without the security the human mind insists on having. They would rather not experience the 'great shock' that Krishnamurti describes and hence cling to their illusory securities.

I think one must be very careful thinking along these lines because, in these dialogues based on creating a new school whose primary concern is a psychological revolution, Krishnamurti continually emphasizes the necessity of the arts of listening, seeing, and observing. The under-development of these arts cannot be categorized as a lack or failure of the will. According to Krishnamurti, the concept of the will is antithetical to the flowering of these arts. If the lack of energy or laziness constituted *akrasia*, we would enter a paradox of the same kind as when Krishnamurti points out that, "when you say eliminate conflict, that very process of elimination is a part of conflict" (p. 48).

Bringing about a psychological revolution

This is all to say that in 'intelligence' (what Socrates might call 'virtue'), there is no choice. Krishnamurti often employs examples of immediate action to express what he means, and these examples often include the metaphor of a 'house that is on fire'. Here is no room for choice or contradiction; there is only action. As Krishnamurti says,

> Can the mind, which sees conflict, have a direct insight into it and see the danger of it? When you see something so tremendously, you end it, it is finished. When you see the actual danger of it, it is finished (p. 53).

An atmosphere of responsibility may be cultivated through holistically examining the distinction between attention and concentration. Concentration revolves around the curriculum and finding ways to keep the material engaging to students. Attention is the great work both educators and students do together. It relates not only to subject material (which demands concentration) but centres primarily on ourselves. Perhaps it is in engaging in these processes that an atmosphere of responsibility can be cultivated both in educator and student. And this is what will *"bring about naturally a psychological revolution, and from this, inevitably, a totally different order in human relationships, which is society."*

Challenges and Opportunities at a Young KFI School

Pathashaala

G GAUTAMA

Under very special circumstances a small school emerged on a large campus, about 85 km away from Chennai, in Kancheepuram district (now Chengalpattu district). On 19 August 2010, Pathashaala started with three teachers and fourteen children in classes 5 to 7. Two of the teachers, Ramesh[1] and Uma[2], moved here after teaching at The School, Chennai, for many years. Consonant with the teachings of Krishnamurti, this was not a simple exercise of replicating what already existed in other KFI schools. The new school had to find viable approaches in its own prevailing context, and hold the teachings at the centre.

The challenges were pedagogic, environmental, and social. It was necessary to survey educational practices and make some choices regarding pedagogy and grouping of children. The architecture, room areas and shapes and the furniture too had to reflect the pedagogic as well as lifestyle choices. In this process, we also learnt from other KFI schools who had had a combined experience of almost 400 years of functioning.

On this new campus the eyes could roam far and wide and on clear days and nights one could see the hill temple in Thirukazhukundram, at a distance of about 10 km. The sky was a huge canopy, with wonderful colours gracing each dawn and dusk. The flat land lies on the flood plains of the Palar River, with clayey soil, and water below the ground at 20 feet. We had to connect to this land and listen to the terrain, the shrubs, the grasses. We had to understand the weather patterns and the way the neighbouring villages used the land and how water flowed in the monsoon months. With just one rain, the clayey soil could turn treacherous for vehicles and for walking. These challenges taken together defined a unique environmental opportunity. But this had to be worked at slowly, one step at a time. It became clear early on, that we would need to bow to the monsoons in November and December. This period of torrential rain, with the possibility of cyclones and flooding, would have to be vacation. This gave us the unusually symmetric yearly pattern of 4-2-4-2 months, with summer vacations in May and June.

Buildings and spaces communicate non-verbally. What kind of buildings would one build in a landscape 13º north of the equator, where the electricity was unreliable? It was decided early that the buildings would be single-storey structures as is the practice in most KFI campuses and they would be modest and inviting. We searched for designs that would be comfortable for residents, even if the fans were not running. Thanks to our architect, M. Sudhakar, who found the design developed by Shri Sameer Kurve of the Centre for Science in Villages, Wardha, we have Wardha tumbler roofing. This hollow roofing ensures very comfortable interiors even in the hot summer. Along with domes, these roofs create a unique visual signature. In these choices we made we were careful not be visually forbidding or appear city-like to the residents of the villages around us.

The only reliable solution to the frequent power cuts, extending at times up to sixteen hours, were DC solar electric lights. A remarkable outcome of this choice is that even during very heavy rains and flooding (as in 2015 and 2016), lights were always available in the living spaces and the roads. Subsequently, Pathashaala has moved to solar power with AC power thanks to the generosity of SELCO, who have supported us from day one. As I write this, the 600-kw solar thermal demonstration project, initiated by IIT Madras, is getting ready to supply steam to the kitchen and also provide a cooling system for kitchen storage. The move towards solar energy has emerged as a good response to rapidly growing global concerns such as the need for renewable energy. This has also sparked many student projects.

It was decided to shift the classroom shape from the rectangular to a 'fat L' as per the design suggested by Herman Hertzberger in 1960. This approach creates contextual pressure for the educator to move away from a lecture and blackboard approach and find other modes of engagement. Active learning and constructivist approaches are thus promoted, and these have the potential for being consonant with the pedagogy suggested by Krishnamurti. Given the positive experiences of the Rishi Valley rural schools, The School, The Valley school, Vikasana and Montessori schools, it was decided to have multi-age learning environments. Our experience at The School served us well and made a multi-age structure for the middle school the natural choice. Pathashaala could begin small and evolve slowly, promoting an inclusive sensibility in the school and in the classrooms. This approach has been extended into the living spaces and the dining hall too, where all of us including the non-teaching staff sit together and eat the same food.

Every private school needs to be financially viable, and one needed clarity about the numbers that would make this possible. One stumbled upon Dunbar's

number (150) in Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point*. Research suggests that this is the maximum number in a social group, that allows every person to get to know every other person. A rationale thus emerged for designing Pathashaala around an eventual strength of 150 members—120 students and about 30 adults. The small size has allowed for a slow growth without anxiety. With financial discipline, and a frugal style of functioning, this has made for financial viability, despite small numbers.

This approach has other consequences too. As we grow from childhood we typically learn to be with a small group of people, three or four or ten, and this becomes our universe. We become conditioned to adjust to this world of demands, with its approvals and rejections. At Pathashaala, possibly we learn that the world is larger than the few whom we like or vice versa. On any given day, each person interacts with a large number of people of the same age and given the multi-age approach, also with some who are older and some younger. Along with the open conversations that are a part of culture classes, this makes individuals encounter multiple, different perceptions. This ever-present challenge requires one to stretch beyond one's conditioned modes of engagement, and attempt to understand Krishnamurti through many practical difficulties.

The choice of Cambridge International as the Exam Board was enjoined upon us for a variety of reasons. It was decided to register with Cambridge University for the IGCSE and A-level examinations. We have found that their approach to assessment, and the offering of subjects like Global Perspectives, are in consonance with the directions of academic excellence, questioning, enquiry, and right thinking indicated by Krishnamurti. We continue to understand and unravel the opportunities that this allows for.

Another opportunity presented itself with the phrase 'lifelong learners'. To embed this perception in the daily functioning of the school, as a reminder to the 'teacher' and the 'student', it was decided to shift the nomenclature to 'educator-learner' (EL) and 'learner-educator' (LE). This new nomenclature, which has been questioned and even at times scoffed at, has however retained its meaning, particularly for senior students who co-hold the school culture. In such an approach, the other can be engaged with respectfully and can be seen as a meaningful contributor in one's learning and growing. For the young it means that they are not just recipients but also valuable members of the teaching-learning community. Their responses, questions, suggestions, and answers, help in the learning of others, both older and younger than they are. Not only are they valuable for all this, but also for the qualities of patience, support, respect, and encouragement they bring to others and to the learning process.

For the educator, it legitimizes being a learner. In fact, one is expected to be a learner. On the one hand, this emphasis on being a learner and not just a teacher of subjects or holder of a responsibility has been greatly liberating for the adult. On the other hand, to demonstrate competence is far easier than to demonstrate being a learner. Not only does this tension keep the adult 'off the pedestal' but also makes it easier to be authentic, humble and to accept one's errors.

One of the most major, and necessary, departures at Pathashaala was with regard to designing the campus with Urine Diverting Dry-composting Toilets (UDDT). Thanks to research by Dagmar Albrecht, a former staff member of Brockwood Park, we could consider dry composting toilets at Pathashaala. All living spaces and common areas have only such toilets. This has ensured that we do not pollute groundwater and do not suffer during the monsoon months. Moreover, compost harvesting is very much a part of the annual calendar—on 2nd April and 2nd October, the latter coinciding with Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. Compost harvesting is also symbolic of Gandhi's refusal to accept untouchability and social segregation. A major challenge arose when the manufacturer of the ceramic toilets closed shop and we had to either abandon the approach or design our own toilets. Perhaps the most heartening aspect has been that LEs have steadfastly opted for the dry toilet approach, choosing to live with and redesign, rather than give it up. It demonstrated that one can think beyond the given, and generate solutions, fresh solutions. Reflecting on the use of dry toilets and compost harvesting, one may come to understand that one need not create sewage and that water is precious. In a world of high consumption, it is possible to consume only as much as one needs.

Four years after Pathashaala commenced, the first batch of two LEs wrote their class 10 exam, and the next year, 2015, had a group of eight. Having managed to grow the school from grades 5, 6, 7 to class 10—a milestone—we were heaving a sigh of relief. But then all the parents, along with these students, met the senior team and said, "Our children are very happy here and we would like them to continue here for classes 11 and 12." This was a big decision and could not be made lightly. We told the parents that we had conceived Pathashaala only up to grade 10, and that we did not have the rooms and laboratories needed for this growth. However, all eight LEs and their parents were persistent.

The senior team at Pathashaala had all worked at The School and in the beginning there had been a proposal to start with classes 11 and 12. We had also had a senior resident student for four years in Pathashaala from 2011 to 2015, as an independent student guided by teachers of Pathashaala and The School. He had loved

being on the campus, living amidst and observing nature, and had completed his A level exams. With this as the background, we responded to these students by offering a 'guidance and support' model of education. Sumitra[3] conceived of the 'Programme of Autonomous Learning' for AS and A level students, with the support of all colleagues. Miraculously, funds and support from parents and well-wishers came forth and, against all odds, a counterintuitive step was taken. Kabir[4] was greatly instrumental in supporting this approach and helping Pathashaala craft the two-and-a-half-year year A level programme. A second block of learning spaces and additional dorms were built, and suddenly Pathashaala was a class 5 to 12 school.

Today it is impossible to think of Pathashaala without the senior LEs, the 'culture bearers' of the school. In the words of an alumnus, 'work that others scoff at are things our LEs ask to do.' They are integral to the culture and values at Pathashaala and provide valuable anchoring.

Twelve years on, what does all this add up to, one may ask?

In Pathashaala we have learnt that the idea of being a 'work-in-progress' is an intelligent response in many situations, and new solutions take time, observation, human hands, and many iterations to stabilize! Since school does not stop, nor the needs of the children and adults, these iterations must happen carefully. We have also learnt that small has been beautiful! Starting small, and remaining small, has had great advantages. Not only has this been manageable, but in this community all people matter. It has been possible for all on campus—LEs, ELs and non-teaching staff—to eat the same meal, at the same time, around the same round tables. An equitable context has value in many ways for the children and adults. It is also a daily reminder that what happens within a small community is related to the larger world outside.

The world *can*, and *does*, see each of us from different perspectives. In our human lives, the tension between the 'being' and 'becoming' is often weighed on the side of the 'becoming'. As we grow up, we are often made to feel that we are not worthy. Only our products, our doings, our marketable goods, are seen as being valuable. If the stigma of unworthiness is carried by young persons, this can haunt them for the rest of their lives. At Pathashaala, one may experience being a real person in the eyes of many, recognized, related to, some words exchanged, sharing of a question, a thought, a joke or a feather. This nourishes something in a child, other than becoming. As one loosens up and becomes free enough to sit and interact with different individuals, even those from very different backgrounds, size or class, one may relax and find it possible to observe what is happening. Small numbers help in that, for they provide a daily challenge to our conditioning.

When there is mutual respect, each one learns to listen to unknown narratives, without fear of acceptance or rejection. One may learn to articulate without fear, and that it is possible to be oneself, valued for who one is and not only judged for what one can do. As we share work and conversation, one may learn that there is a common world we share. Possibly the kindness of an unknown village woman touches us, as also perhaps the care that a new EL shows. One may find that simple clothes are enough, as people value you not for the brands you wear. One may learn to express, knowing that questions and speculations are valued, and one can struggle and find another way of doing things. And in the observation of life around and in oneself, one may discover a hum, a tune that sings itself … and shows one where the next step is to fall, where one must turn, where one goes along, and where one walks to a different drummer, one that only one can hear ….

It may be that creating convivial contexts of affection and care, reinforcing the being, non-verbally, and shaping the grounds for living together, collaborating, creating, and re-creating, enquiring with words, and in silence…is what adults can offer the young…with their own simple joyful enjoyment of the sky, the bird in flight and a snake crawling away….

*Note: The author works at Pathashaala and has anchored its development at all levels from 2001, identifying the land, construction and evolving the pedagogic and sanitation approaches.

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1 K. Ramesh has been the headmaster of the school since inception.

2 Uma Iyer has held many roles, Educator-Learner, Acting Headmistress, Joint Director, and is now Coordinator, Finance and Administration.

3 Sumitra M. Gautama was Coordinator Academics before being appointed as Principal, Pathashaala in 2018, in which role she continues. She also anchors the Outreach programmes.

4 Kabir Jaithirtha (late) a long-term trustee of KFI and member of the Pathashaala executive committee, was an unfailing support for us in building a small school with Cambridge exams and supporting the creation of the A level programme.

A Kaleidoscope of Reflections

INDUS CHADHA

Quite serendipitously, just after I returned from a wonderful fellowship at Teachers College, Columbia University, I fleetingly met an editor of this journal at the Valley School. I vividly remembered an insightful session with him that inspired me to cultivate a teaching portfolio and keep a journal. So, I took a deep breath, overcame my reticence, and ran over to share what I had recently experienced. Still bursting with 'aha' moments, I must have been rather inarticulate in those few minutes. He kindly invited me to write a reflective piece on my current journey in teaching and learning at the Valley, which has been enriched through interactions with educators elsewhere. Here it is.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver

Beginnings

Where does the story begin? I first arrived at the Valley School, in 1995, as a shy eight-year-old with a burgeoning social conscience. I didn't understand then why my parents, inspired by a slim paperback called *Freedom from the Known*, had sought out this school for me. As I grew familiar with the myriad paths around this unusual forest, I began to find my voice.

About a decade later, I followed a poem, Sylvia Plath's 'Tulips', all the way from the Valley to Smith College, where Plath had felt as if the world was splitting open at her feet like "a ripe, juicy watermelon". Indeed, on those very green lawns, amidst archival research and literary theory, with Plath scholars and poets, I felt almost the same way myself. As an intern at the Poetry Centre, as I heard visiting poets not only read their finished poems aloud but also share notes on their craft, snatches of their lives, I could resonate with how Plath felt when she met W. H. Auden when he visited Smith: "Oh, god, if this is life, half-heard, glimpsed, [with] the god-

eyed tall-minded ones, let me never go blind or get cut off from the agony of learning..."

Hungry for more, I went on to the School of the Arts at Columbia University. Here I took a part-pedagogy, part-practicum seminar and joined Columbia Artists/Teachers, which gave me the opportunity to teach. On the morning of my first class as student-teacher, as I walked around yellow crime scene tape, and into a challenging classroom in Harlem, I noticed immediately the power of a teacher's rapport with her students. How, because of the bond they shared with her, they were willing to open their hearts to me too. That's when I discovered the joy of being a bridge between a child and an idea. I found teaching to be the most intellectually stimulating, creatively satisfying and emotionally rewarding work.

Eventually, I was keen to return to the singular wonderland of my own childhood to teach there. With a newfound sense of appreciation for the handful of schools set up by Krishnamurti, I returned to the Valley School to teach. Here, we attempt to let children flourish in an atmosphere that is free from competition, comparison, and fear in all its forms. I would hope that this means each of my students feels free to grow and bloom in their own way, at their own pace, making all the mistakes that they need to, to learn. My wish for them is to be unfettered by expectation—mine, their own, the world's. To be free. It feels like a good reason for me to be engaged in a process of continuous self-discovery myself.

As time has gone by, I have become more curious about education. I have been keen to find opportunities to reflect on my own philosophy, pedagogy and practice as an educator. Thus, it was sheer good fortune to join an extraordinary cohort of fellow educators from around the world at Klingenstein Summer Institute hosted by the Teachers College to do just this. Below, I have tried to pull together my notes and thoughts on all three interwoven strands—philosophy, pedagogy, and practice—to share what I found most meaningful.

Philosophy

Here are a few big ideas, incisive questions, and other marginalia from a meaningful session on the Philosophy of Education.

Big Idea #1

There is an important difference between the *taught* curriculum and the *learned* curriculum. What I say I am *teaching*…may not be what my students

are *learning*. A personal teaching philosophy is not only what, how or why I teach, but also, what are my students learning?

This reminded me of a time when I juxtaposed a poem of Sylvia Plath's with some poems of Ted Hughes' that we had in our twelfth grade literature course, in my instinctively feminist effort to bring more women's voices into the canon. However, a boy came up to me at the end of the class and said, "Until now, somehow I always thought that Hughes was the villain of the piece but now I see that they were both simply flawed and passionate human beings, like us all, who did the best they could at that moment in time…".

[M]ake conscious, thoughtful decisions of what kind of teacher you want to be, and remain reflective about the kind of teacher you are always in the process of becoming . . .

—Fenstermacher and Soltis in *Approaches to Teaching*

Big Idea #2

A *teaching philosophy* should be an exercise in *continual self-reflection*. How can I be a reflective practitioner of what I value? An enduring philosophy should be one on which I constantly reflect.

Your philosophy must keep you uneasy. How does it keep you in a perpetual state of becoming?

—Maxine Greene

What makes me reflect on what I hold to be true is how I am constantly challenged to think again. I vividly remember an assembly we had at school when I was a student. Two teachers, both of whom I loved and admired, engaged in a passionate debate. One said, "If you have said you will be somewhere at a particular time, you must be there—no matter what—out of respect for the time of others." The other asked, "What if you saw the sun was setting? Or a beautiful insect perched on a flower? Would you not stop to admire it?" Even today, I often reconcile these two urges in my own heart, knowing there is no one right answer. It's the knots of these sorts of contradictions that keep us curious.

Big Idea #3

Great teaching assumes many forms. How does my *philosophy* look in *practice*? How can I modify my teaching to make it more closely reflect my philosophy? How can my philosophy be adjusted to reflect my teaching more closely? What are the values I want to impart to my students? Where are those values in my philosophy?

We teach values by HOW we teach.

—John Dewey

Once, in the 8th grade, our class wickedly locked a teacher out of our classroom and could not hear her knocking on the door through our chatter. Undeterred, she climbed in through the window to begin her class on time. Only a little ruffled, after a quick admonishment, she dove passionately into her subject. These days, I often find myself jumping through windows both literal and figurative, to reach my students through the din keeping us apart. I do so with as little grumpiness and as much grace as I can muster, drawing inspiration from all those who have done this so beautifully before me. It is not about what we, as teachers, specifically do or don't do, but about how we are *being*.

Pedagogy

The other thing that had a big impact on me was the invitation to ask ourselves: *Who am I from? Who do I carry with me?*

Both my grandmothers were teachers. Dadima, a refugee, came from Lahore to Bombay after Partition and taught all her life, through marriage and motherhood, through raising three children. At first, she simply alternated her only two sarees, always neatly ironed and draped. As the years went by, her collection grew and she enjoyed her starched cottons and the occasional silk, before retiring as a beloved headmistress. Ammama, born and raised in Bombay, grew up reading in the corridors of her father's premier academic bookstore. She earned her BEd a couple of decades after her MA in Sociology, having raised four children in the years that intervened, and savoured those precious few years of teaching—leaving only when I was born, her first grandchild, to lavish her love upon me.

Often, I feel them both sitting inside my heart. Two women so different from one another who both found meaning and joy in the classroom. I carry each with me into my classroom too. Each morning, as the years go by, they remind me to be resilient, and stay open to wonder. Interwoven with the ideas of all the wonderful thinkers and philosophers who inspire me are the lives of my grandmothers. Often, it is in those most visceral strands that I find my answers.

Like Mrs Dalloway, I spend a lot of time preparing. Each class of mine begins long before I teach it, playing itself out in my mind many times over before it starts, as I wonder what I can bring to introduce my students to the

text they will encounter. Sometimes I bring a moment from another time and place, sometimes a snippet of conversation I overheard, sometimes I bring a photograph, a memory, a line from a poem, a piece of my grandmother's advice. Sometimes I bring things I would not share with anyone else, but for my students, to build that bridge, I will bring anything.

As students of literature, they will need to build their own bridges to the texts they encounter. Bridges that will be made up of their own selves, their own constellation of texts, their own worlds—and all the gifts I bring for them into my classes. Just as my own bridges would have been impossible to build without the riches that were shared with me by those from whom I learnt.

Practice

…teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heart-breaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require.

—Parker Palmer

Perhaps what was most magical for me at the Summer Institute was the feeling of camaraderie with my fellow teachers, from which I will continue to draw the courage to keep my heart open. Sitting in a room full of English teachers from schools around the world, I realised that we may teach in very different places but we are all working within the constraints of our own contexts—whether in the choice of the texts that we may teach or how our students are ultimately assessed on what they have learnt. And yet, we do the best we can to keep the subject alive. Never losing sight of their need to do well in their examinations, we do not allow prescribed textbooks or examination formats to limit how our students see the subject. To teach literature is to ask, 'What does it mean to be a human being in the world?' Indeed, I will never forget the joy of discovering how we can always 'bring a radical pedagogy to a traditional curriculum' in our practice.

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.

—bell hooks

My philosophical conviction in life is that we did not come to keep the world as it is, we came to the world in order to remake it.

—Paulo Freire

I feel fortunate to be teaching a subject like literature. Seeing ourselves as part of the continuum of human experience, and knowing, through the poems, novels, plays, and short stories we encounter together, that people have lived through great cataclysms and upheavals before, brings us solace. It assuages our collective anxiety in a time of so much uncertainty and reminds us that we are never alone, that we are always part of the larger constellation of human lives and experiences, across time and space. Perhaps it fosters a sense of common humanity in us. Indeed, what else is there!

As my students learn to inhabit the world of literature with one another, as they listen, speak, read, and write their way through conversations, with open hearts and open minds, with clarity and compassion, I watch them carefully. What keeps coming back to me is Dewey's vision of education empowering children to think for themselves and to live with each other. If you teach children with respect and affection, and encourage them to question everything, then you empower them to become critical as well as creative thinkers, and compassionate human beings.

You are the world. You are not a Russian or an American, you are not Hindu or Muslim. You are apart from these labels. You are the rest of mankind.

—Krishnamurti

Beginning again…

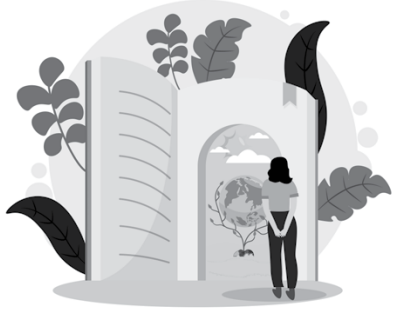
As former students, my spouse and I are beneficiaries of the Valley School's enlightened educational philosophy. We have a distinct, almost tactile memory of how it brings out children's innate curiosity and intrinsic compassion. We know it empowers them to grow and bloom to their fullest potential.

As we filled up an admission form for our daughter a few weeks ago, we found ourselves reminiscing and reflecting. We are deeply aligned with the school's intent. We want our daughter to grow up in an oasis where she will be treated with respect and affection. We are keen that she explores herself and the world with sensitivity and authenticity.

We have enormous faith in the school's approach. It will be wonderful to watch her study insects, recognize bird calls, discover whole worlds in singular trees, play games, shape clay, craft wood, mix paint, sing and dance. It will be fascinating to see her learn how to balance between freedom and responsibility, how to be both perceptive and articulate, both feisty and kind.

But as we sat down together with a blank paper to begin work on our note to the school, we realised that, more than anything else, this new journey

in our old familiar wonderland will be yet another worthwhile invitation for us, too, to reflect and introspect, to grow and bloom. For here, we are all—students, teachers, alumni, parents—engaged in reconciling philosophy, pedagogy and practice.



Studying and Teaching History with my Students

Reflections on my experiences

PARIKSHIT SHARMA

I cannot be a teacher without exposing who I am

—Paulo Freire

Setting the scene

It was not the first time I was entering a history class, but it was indeed the first time I was entering a history class where almost all the people in the classroom would be perceiving me not as their fellow, but as their 'teacher', probably because I was the only one with a beard and had the controls of that online classroom window. I don't think they knew it at that moment, but these young people were also my first official 'students', and I was their first Senior-School History-Teacher. This was to be the first class of their 8th grade academic year. The structure of their school curriculum was such that before this point in time, they had only been exposed to 'history' under the ambit of 'social studies'. So, this was also their first time entering, as one of them called it, 'a proper history class'. This was thus the beginning of their being 'properly' exposed to and invited into the discipline of history.

For me, the teacher in this scene, it was the start of a continuous journey of asking myself difficult and complex questions; be it about the syllabus; or about the kind of relationship one was to maintain and cultivate with both the student as well as the subject at hand; or about the very discipline of history, its meaning, relation and significance with regard to the worldview that I and my students currently hold or could hold in time. For all these questions to come to even a working resolution, however momentary, one must take a path that allows one to be, first, a 'student' of these questions, and then hopefully a 'teacher'. But why can't one just go and impart the historical 'information' or 'knowledge' already present in the books, and be

done with the whole thing? Isn't that the job of a teacher? Why does one need to be a student first in order to teach?

When my brother asked me this question, this is the somewhat dramatic response I gave him: "One needs to do this because one is deeply interested in seeing that the classroom is not a dead space, but rather, an active and alive one. A class that has lively minds who would never chew and gulp down the pages of a book just because authority demands this; instead, a class that would enthusiastically jostle with, examine, carefully observe and, if need be, challenge not only each phrase written in these books, but each phrase written on the blank canvas of this universe that we inhabit together…Hence, one needs to be a student first because one, along with one's fellows, tries to have a curious mind that is making sense of oneself, one's society, one's world and one's existence."

Singer provides a less dramatic response. He writes about the importance of the study of the social world. He advocates a more active, immersive, and creative engagement with the same in order to fulfil its purpose, which "… is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world." (2003, p. 18). He further argues that, "because of the complexity of our world and because of a democratic society's dependence on thoughtful, informed, active citizens", a social science teacher must encourage minds that are thoughtful; that do not conform to authoritarian regimes; and that can think through the problems of our world. There would then be the possibility of taking collective steps for the public good. Singer's argument also calls for an active and honest participation from the teacher in the whole process of learning together. He asks, "How can we teach students to value ideas and knowledge and to become participants in democratic decision-making if we hide what we believe? Sometimes the best way to include students in discussions is for teachers to express their opinions and involve classes in examining and critiquing them."

Now, if I were to take Singer's suggestion seriously, I would first need to construct my own opinions and understanding of the concepts of History. How else could a teacher hope to cultivate a classroom space that actively engages with what is presented? In doing so, as Freire puts it, "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is him/herself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They [both the teacher and the student] become jointly responsible for a process

in which all grow" (2005, p. 80). Thus, they bring forth the whole process of learning and creating new knowledge for all to observe and engage with.

All of this is not to argue that the classroom is a space that should tend to me and my quest. On the contrary, I must also participate in the same with the students for any learning and creation of knowledge to take place. If the reader finds this statement agreeable but too idealistic to begin with, then I must share the fact that I did too. But then 9th June 2021 arrived and started obliterating my view of this 'idea being too idealistic' by introducing me to a bunch of intelligent, argumentative and sharp 13-14-year-olds, or as I learned to call them 'respected social scientists'.

A peek into our classroom interactions

Very early in our classes we had established that history has something to do with the past. When asked to articulate their thoughts on what they think history is, one of the students said that through history we get to know about, "what could have never happened, but still happened"; another said that it has to do with, "how we got to today"; another argued on similar lines when she said she finds it, "funny how things were done in the past". The common consensus of the class was to see history in relation to the past. But this is where a discussion-based class makes things interesting. In our first class I had told them to record everyone's arguments, and I promised them that a time would come where you'd get to challenge your fellow 'social scientists' on the statements they have made today. The promised time did arrive, that too very soon, when some of the students argued how history is not just about the past but also the present. One of them picked up on the idea of "history telling us how we got to today" and asked a very pertinent theoretical question, "if we know how we got to today, then by learning about today could we not predict where will we be tomorrow? So, is the future predetermined?" Another student added, "This makes history about the past as well as the present."

Then one student remarked, "but we actually can't put a finger on the present, can we? The moment I'm finished completing this sentence is the moment this has become the past." The respected social scientists seemed, for a moment, to move towards an agreement that 'history, at the end of the day, is definitely about the past, but the past could mean anything—the last moment, yesterday, twenty years back, 200 years back and so on. However, as mentioned earlier, these were argumentative eight graders, so one of them interrupted the whole conversation that seemed to come to a resolution

and said, "but our understanding of the past could be false, right?" Another jumped in and said, "so history would be about the past as well as the truth". Following this was the infamous line, "whatever is true to you could be untrue to me", said by another student. 'The true 'interpretation' of the historical evidence' took over the discussion, and then came another idea of 'what is evidence for you might not be evidence for me'. Gradually we did move towards agreeing that history is a 'continuous process of moulding facts to interpretation and of interpretation to the facts'. As Carr said, "the historian without facts is rootless and futile; the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless." (1961, pp. 29–30).

The meaning of history may have seemed elusive, but the problems of history were now evident. My fellow students were upset and very rightly so, for they couldn't solve this problem. We did, however, did establish that history is indeed related to, firstly, events from the past i.e., 'facts', secondly, the process of gathering and organizing information from the past i.e. historical research, thirdly, explanations about the relationships between specific historical events, and lastly, broader explanations or 'theories' about how and why change takes place. Nevertheless, we had no clue about how to solve its problems. One student said, "we have no way of knowing that all the people involved in this are trustworthy, or that these processes even work".

Well, there it was, the first of many lessons that history gave us: 'don't trust anyone' or 'trust everyone' or 'check it for yourself' or better 'be aware that you are trusting or distrusting someone while you build your tentative, or momentary, working understanding about them or what they are saying'. There were definitely cynics in the class who said, "what's the point of it all, we'll never know exactly what the truth is", but then there were optimists who said, "but won't you want to know all the possible truths that existed in the past, they are all a part of us today". Interestingly enough, most of the cynics appeared to be males and most of the optimists, female.

Learning with tentativeness

"Pari, do you have political opinions?" or "Tell me then—BJP or Congress?" I said, "Let me study this year's manifestos first, only then could I respond". "Let me study it first", became a very common phrase in class. Understanding that whatever people say or write is but a 'claim', not the truth, became an instinctive reaction of the class. Analyzing, juxtaposing these claims with others, or challenging them, became one's 'right' as well

as one's 'responsibility'. Even controversial questions about politics, gender, power, sex, and correctness were being dealt with intelligently, like social scientists. 'Hunters and gatherers' also became 'gatherers and hunters' because 'why should we say the male occupation first?', I asked. We understood that just like our world, history is a complex construct. Hence not taking things as they are said to be but to observe them and to examine them was seen as the logical thing to do, in order to at least stay away from falsity, if not reach the 'truth'.

Later in the year, we revisited our idea of history being evidence-based, as we asked what makes a piece of the past, 'evidence'. While studying the Atlantic slave trade, we read a lot of records of the white European slave-traders. However, a realization seeped in, that whatever we know of the horrors of slavery we know from the records (evidence) of these 'white men'. We don't know how the slaves viewed their times, as they were not allowed to read or write. Slaves couldn't write but they could tell stories. So, could we, the lovers of 'solid-empirical-material evidence' consider slave folktales as evidence? What if we tread tentatively and see for ourselves if these folktales hold any truth? Virginia Hamilton's *People Could Fly* (1985) that narrates black American folktales, to our surprise, did hold an ample measure of truth. As we juxtaposed these with whatever material evidence we had, we questioned our obsession with only 'written' evidence and tentatively held space for even folktales as evidence in our history classroom.

My professor had once advised me that I cannot give them all the required information about the past, and I should instead attempt to develop a thinking that will be historical in nature. While we went through our syllabus and learnt about European exploration, slavery, colonialism and freedom movements, we learnt not to forget that the seemingly elusive solution to the problem of history is messy and calls for our creative participation. Hence, we kept a few of the following questions in our pockets to keep us thinking as curious beings:

- Do individual events have identifiable and understandable causes?
- Are these causes single or multiple? If there are multiple causes, are some causes more significant than others?
- Are there patterns in history? If so, what are they? What causes them?
- Do natural laws determine what happens in history? If so, what are they? What are their origins?

- Are individuals and groups able to make choices based on free will, or are they subject to historical and social forces beyond their control?
- Is the future predetermined, or is it contingent on accident and unpredictable incident?
- Can individual or group action influence the course of the future? Would the world be different if Hitler had died at childbirth?
- Is there a goal or purpose to history?

Such questions, identified by Singer, are aimed at keeping alive the spirit of enquiry in the study of history.

Post-script

Now, in 2023, this group is in ninth grade and things have changed. We have new challenges this year; a creature called the 'ICSE examination' has entered our classroom. Nonetheless, on behalf of the group I claim that if we maintain a spirit of dialogue and solidarity with each other, we could come out of these challenges upholding active and curious minds. As one girl said in my first class, "history gives me courage. Courage to know that things do change…." and might I add to this, "... people working together change them…."

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The Hungry Tide[1] and the Country Within

MALLIKA ASIRVATHAM

Who, indeed, are we? Where do we belong? And as I listened to the sounds of those syllables, it was as if I was hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. Who was I? Where did I belong? In Kolkata or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or poetry?

—Nirmal in his notebook

Some version of this question resonates in all our hearts at some level.

When we open a novel, we enter a unique territory, a landscape of story, a story not only of those specific characters in their specific setting, but also humanity's story, our story. And who doesn't love a good story? That is the reason why literature in general, and the novel in particular, is wonderful to teach. For one thing, the real teacher is the novel. So why get in the way of a great book and teacher by doing any 'teaching' ourselves? The novel tells its own story of course, and exemplifies, like the dolphins in the book, that to 'see' was to 'speak' and '...simply to exist was to communicate....'

In the spirit of that last sentence, I would like to share my experiences with my Elective English classes and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. This is a book of such vast and sweeping landscapes of the human experience, that it feels like a syllabus for life. In my first reading of this novel, several years before I even knew that it was on any syllabus and that I would get the privilege to be teaching it, one of my first responses after completing it was to think to myself—wow, I wish I could teach this book. Actually, it was more like: what couldn't I teach with this book? Imagine my joy at

1 *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh (2004)

the realization that this was on the syllabus when I joined Sahyadri School. However, I had got one thing wrong in my earlier response: the role that I had imagined I was going to play as the 'teacher'. It turned out that I was the one being taught and that it was not only the novel that was the teacher, but every one of my students in the Elective English classes.

I believe that the novel needs minimal 'teaching' but students are required to read it thoroughly before they come to class, and then we sit and talk together. We share our responses about each chapter, about each character, about the ideas, and about language. Each year, the same novel, the same putative teacher but a different set of students, and a whole world of responses that reveal not only the connections that the novel is making with every individual. The responses also reveal something new in this story that I am rereading so many times over with different eyes, borrowed eyes. For instance, I was sharing my response to a particular part of the narrative that I had found beautiful, and commented on the poetic nature of the language. The students looked at the section and with an almost audible gasp, one of the students made a discovery: much of the narration in the section *was* poetry written as prose, with sentences in rhyming couplets. This was something I hadn't noticed myself! I think this was in year three of my 'teaching' the novel. The discussions that this led to were so rich, branching out from which character was speaking in poetry, and in which language, to the relationship that the character had with the narrator, with the landscape, and with the novel. In subsequent years, I have had students making the connection on their own with this spoken 'poem' and the fact that the narrator describes this character as his 'muse'. Together we learn to 'see' the world of the novel, and thus the world. Many conversations have happened spontaneously outside class, often with an individual student who has made a sudden discovery that connects the novel to the outside world or is concerned about some aspect of a character's life journey.

Connections were made with the characters. They became as real as friends and family members and the aunty-next-door. Sometimes they were identified as people students knew: "Those are my parents!" exclaimed one student. They cared what happened to the people in the novel and why those things were happening. How could people choose to live in this hostile territory? How much suffering there must have been in their previous life, if the tide country with all its dangers feels like home? There was a certain tenderness in some of these conversations about suffering and stoicism. Then there were the relationships. Did Piya love Fokir? Did Fokir love Piya?

Could he love her and his wife? And what about Kanai? Surely, he is too old for Piya, said one student, who was convinced Piya and Fokir were meant for each other. There were some wonderful conversations with a student on the nature of love in my seventh year of teaching. What is love really? Can it be defined by conventions, by romance? Can limits be placed on it? Some students could identify with Piya's rocky relationship with her mother tongue versus her relationship with English. Most of all, these characters reminded us to look at the multi-layered sections of our diverse society and see people as individuals rather than representatives of a class. One class noticed and cut out a newspaper article headlined: 'Tiger kills crab-catcher in Bengal's Sundarbans'. That could have been Fokir, it wasn't just some anonymous fisherman, somewhere in India anymore.

Other connections were made that resonated with students' own lives. "I felt as though Ghosh had taken a break from translating the minds of others and was talking to me", wrote one of my students in a lyrical exploration of how language was used in the novel. This was a paean to the novel in sixteen and a half pages, and she felt she had not said all she wanted to say. I still cherish a copy of this essay as one of the most beautiful expressions of the relationship between a reader and a novel, and I am humbled by it. The assigned task had been for each student to pick an element of the novel they connected with or found interesting, and to write about it and present it to the class in any way they liked. However, this stopped being just an assignment and became a work of love. Making a presentation on a theme or character of their choice has been something students in several classes have done and each time I am delighted at the depth and heart of these presentations, which have usually been accompanied either by essays or beautifully detailed mind maps. Each could be a template for a lesson for next year's class, and perhaps for understanding the human heart.

I wonder what next year's class will teach me?

Child-centred Education

Uncovering assumptions

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN
RHYTHM PARIKH, VENKATESH ONKAR AND KAMALA MUKUNDA

Several theories about education are available for the seeker. The teachers at Centre for Learning, Bangalore, felt the need to share their ruminations on, and experiments with, some educational discourses through webinars online. The article below began with a two-hour conversation among all the CFL teachers around the catch-phrase 'child-centred' education. After those initial stirrings, Venkatesh, Kamala and Rhythm further investigated the concept and created a script for a dialogue.

The purpose of the conversation was to carefully examine particular views of child-centred education, in addition to sharing perspectives that may enlarge the meaning of this phrase. We hope that these ideas encourage you to ponder on this popular educational idea and ask questions!

Introduction

Rhythm (R): Here I am, having worked in an alternative school for a few years, and it's an interesting question to me, what is child-centred education?

Kamala (K): One way of thinking about this is that currently mainstream education keeps curriculum and adult's notions at its centre. It does not keep the child at its centre, that's obvious. So, then child-centred education would be to flip this around. But what does that involve?

Venkatesh (V): Children are kind of dragged through this curriculum willy-nilly. So, what could it mean to keep the child at the centre?

K: Shall we first try to open up multiple different kinds of meanings of child-centred education?

R: I have always thought it means an individualized learning experience, because after all everyone IS unique, abilities and ways of learning ARE unique, so it seems unreasonable to work in a very general way with all

children. And I guess one could vary both the content and the teaching style, to suit each learner.

It could also mean, let the child do whatever they want, whenever they want. Centred, in that sense, around their desires, inclinations, interests in the moment.

K: It could mean that if a child shows a spark, an interest or talent, we must cultivate that. Child-centred education must realise each child's potential. Centred around deeper, lasting interests and abilities.

V: It could just mean, make learning enjoyable. This phrase child-centred implies an individual child with their individual needs and individual fulfilment. Child-friendly is a term I am more comfortable with. Or *children*-centred.

The freedom model

R: Nice, we have a few definitions. So can we begin with this—letting children do what they want, rather than making them do what we want. Some schools have tried this, the 'freedom' model I guess, and they claim good results. I am a bit sceptical, but can we look at it?

K: I get why people would find this model attractive! In our milieu especially, wherever I go, my life and my experiences are personalised, made just the way I want it. My meals are 'a la carte' or 'buffet'! Why should school not also be personalised for me and my child?

V: Which brings in *choice*. Child-centred—does it mean the child must be able to choose?

R: Choice brings in a sense of autonomy, and therefore, maybe greater engagement in the learning process. In other words, choice brings motivation. There are a few schools like this, where children set the agenda, and I imagine they must feel so involved, so engaged!

K: The choices a child makes, what are they based on? Is there something fundamental or 'real' about these? It seems to be choice based on emotional state—some willingness or readiness to engage. So, I find it difficult to 'trust' the process of choice, deeply.

Another thing, do we recognize that the hold of influence is very strong? Peers can influence us, the media, society's norms influence us. What I choose to do is largely because of various influences, I am not sure if there is any special 'me-ness' to it. Now, as a teacher I can be as careful as ever not to

influence my students, striving toward child-centredness, but it only leaves the field open for all the other influences!

R: But this is very fundamental, how to question it? Parents see their children as mini-choosers, and believe that their lives are enhanced by their choices. The whole idea of agency, autonomy, is built on choice. Personally, I think that motivation comes when there is the 'illusion' of a chooser.

V: If what I am is a bundle of influences, then is there a 'me' that is separate from those influences? That seems an incoherent idea, even though in my daily life I feel there is that separate me. In alternative milieus, we tend to ask children, what do you authentically want, what is *your own choice*, as opposed to what you are influenced to do? And this emphasises the special choices of the special chooser.

R: That's why I called it an illusion. To me child-centred is not very interesting if it remains at the level of choice….

The individual fulfilment model

V: The other idea that was mentioned earlier seems more promising, about ensuring that each child fulfils their potential, realises their dreams, in the longer term. In such an education there may not be choice and freedom, since children don't always know what's best for them, and adults might have to apply some pressure, some push…yet it is child-centred in the sense that it means to ensure each child's individual fulfilment.

K: Reminds me of the Tiger Mom phenomenon! Do you remember that? One must be very careful, when getting children to fulfil their potential, that we adults are not projecting our dreams and ambitions onto them. Pressure can become very high, even if it is a subtle movement.

But on a different note. If I think about the big goals of education, radically questioning aspects of society that disturb us, such as prejudice, apathy…would this definition of child-centredness address these? Being largely about individual fulfilment?

R: Let's explore a bit more. You are kind of reducing child-centred education to self-centred education! It need not be so. Are you creating a contradiction between a student pursuing her potential and the goal of education being to address deeper questions of society and human life? Can't they both happen together? Maybe when people pursue their own potential, it might lead to more creative outcomes in the long run, solutions to deeper problems and so on. These may not be contradictory aims.

V: Yes, I agree, it does seem that I can 'follow my dream' and 'help society.' I can love car design *and* help make environmentally responsible cars. But just maybe, we are fooling ourselves in such a situation. Isn't the attitude of needing fulfilment a problem? Can we question the notion of fulfilment itself? It sounds strange even to my ears as I am saying it because we have normalised self-fulfilment to such an extent. But fulfilment has this peculiar property that it often sets up an opposition between self and other. It's not a win-win situation, it automatically sets up a division.

K: Hmm… but what's the *opposite* of seeking fulfilment then? It is not a lack of fulfilment in the sense of being unhappy or frustrated in life. Sometimes we glimpse that happiness and completeness are possible without the constant seeking of something more. I guess the issue is the *seeking*?

V: Earlier you were talking about the development of talent and personality, am I right? A big part of this development is comparison. A few people become rich and famous through creativity and interest. We hold these up as the models for all of us to follow. But what does this do to the young person's psyche?

K: Absolutely. The whole hero phenomenon. You know, looking back I can say, while ability and talent seem great, and one can truly enjoy the activity for which one has a talent, it often creates a loop of pain and a *lack* of fulfilment—both for those who have achieved and also those who are constantly striving to achieve. Psychologically it is a kind of a lifelong curse, generating feelings of incompleteness. Why can't we leave children to enjoy their talents without the pressure of having to fulfil themselves through them?!

R: Or even to have the option not to follow a talent if they don't want to! But you know, this goes against all that we traditionally teach children—dream big, try until you succeed, get all the awards, and so on.

V: We find ourselves practising longing. So, when we get what we want, we continue to long for something else. It is an endless loop, our addiction to seeking and longing.

Anyway, we've got to remember, this follow-your-dreams thing is for a narrow portion of humankind. The vast majority don't even have the option of dreaming big. So, I don't know how meaningful it is then.

K: Our dialogue here on practising longing reminds me of that poem 'Desiderata'…it says: '*You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.*'

Also, I've been reading that relationship and interdependence are more crucial to human existence than the human individual with his or her own talents and ambitions. We are not alone in the world, and to put oneself at the centre invites all kinds of pain and suffering! So, since I care about a child's well-being, I will not make an individual child the centre of our endeavour.

R: There's something very interesting in what's being suggested here. It feels like we need more time to come back to this issue.

Can we make learning enjoyable and accessible for all children?

R: We are saying that for us, child-centred is not about individual choice and freedom, nor about personal fulfilment. Can we go back to what Venkatesh said earlier—that to him, child-centred education is all about making learning possible and enjoyable for each and every child?

V: Yes, I meant, in a given classroom interaction, can I deliver content so that each child gets something? Because if I don't think that way, I'll just deliver my lesson and that's the end of it!

R: Right, if you say each child gets something…you are implying that my expectations will differ for each child. I need to assess each child's learning in an ongoing way. And you are implying that I define the content I want to teach, but in varied ways each child will learn, and I must find a way to make that happen? So, it is child-centred in that way.

K: Wait—can I just ask—is this about figuring out each child's learning style and then matching instructional style to fit that? That doesn't hold any water.

V: No, no, it's not at all about learning and teaching styles or modes, but more about ensuring learning no matter what. We can use a variety of methods, or we can just patiently repeat, which works well most of the time! With small numbers in a class, we can ensure individual understanding, though not all to the same degree.

R: So then, child-centred means making knowledge and skills accessible to children. In that word *accessible*, a lot is implied. We are trying to ensure that we don't ever give up on any child's learning and understanding.

V: Yes, when I see a child, I *must* see the potential to learn. To move from wherever they are at this moment.

R: Can we expand this potential to learn beyond knowledge and skills, to a more holistic sense—ultimately for overall well-being?

K: Definitely. This is one way of looking at child centric that excites me: that we respect each child as a learner, in a holistic way. Respect takes the form of being interested in the child's thinking, listening and taking what they say with the right amount of seriousness, not 'talking down' to them, and so on.

V: The culture of our school is that our regard for each child is unconditional—it does not depend on them being good, or good at something. The adults' respect and affection are automatically given to *all* children, no matter what. And I am not talking about praise and appreciation, feeding egos!

K: In a school community that practices this kind of child-centred education, children are not incomplete beings. Fundamentally, spiritually, they are equal to the adults. They know less and they are immature in many ways, but in a deep sense, the adult and child are on the same page. This, for me, removes the tension between adult-centred and child-centred.

R: None of this need stop the adults from making strong demands on children and challenging their behaviour, right?

V: Of course not. But there is the strong and continual message from the adults that every one of us is a 'child of the universe', needing no justification or reason to be accepted. This is what child-centred means to me too.

The issue of passivity and resistance in learning

R: I am also happy with this view of child-centred.

But I am still thinking about something you said right at the start, that children are being dragged through an education dictated by adults. It creates a dichotomy between autonomy and passivity. Maybe one reason to worry about adult-driven curricula is that students become passive in school. And to ensure more involvement from the students, we say that the curriculum should be child-centred.

V: Why are students passive at school? I think this is a very important question. Yes, knowledge is fragmented, disconnected from their lives, so

they feel uninvolved. Time also is fragmented in schools. And students are motivated by external rewards, so they don't feel an ownership of the curriculum.

K: Of course, children should be involved in what they learn in many ways. Is that why passivity can come about in even the most exciting and rich learning experience that we as educators may have created?

R: One model we seem to have is: *if* there is autonomy, *then* there will be engagement.

V: But what is autonomy actually? What if it is synonymous with engagement? There is a causal arrow we are drawing: first ensure autonomy, then engagement will follow. I would question this. What if the causal arrow goes the other way? If you engage with something openly, you may learn about it deeply, run with it, become an 'independent' learner!

K: Is this a chicken and egg situation? Which leads to which?!

V: Engagement leads to something that may *look* like autonomy. Engagement may be an 'allowing of something to happen together,' making space for something to emerge. But autonomy feels like an imposition, shaping the world according to my own wishes at the time.

R: Back to the chooser, and to the one who has to be fulfilled! However, the issue of resistance and boredom remains.

K: Can we encourage students, and ourselves as curious human beings, to learn about resistance and boredom? Normally we want to quickly overcome resistance and boredom, make the environment exciting to prevent or remove boredom; but I'm asking can we learn about boredom or resistance itself?

R: Let's assume the child is not in a hostile or exploitative environment, where resistance may be necessary. But here, as we go through a fairly benign day, we seem to have a constant story in our heads about what we prefer to do and what we would like to avoid doing. This could apply to simple tasks, like washing the dishes, or more complex tasks.

K: I do hear this voice of inner choice! Are you suggesting it prevents engagement?

R: If we can notice this voice and its energy, then perhaps we could learn to simply pay attention to the task at hand, no?

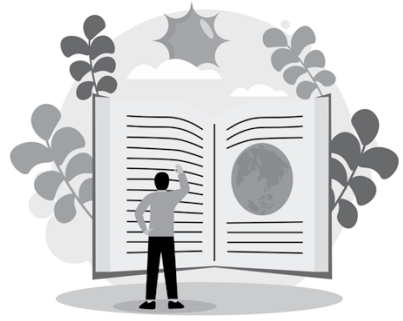
V: Yes, learning to engage with tasks brings its own meaning, and a sense of participation. This is very interesting because it is no longer about

entertaining students in order to make them learn. It is rather helping us see the richness that is inherent in *involvement without resistance*.

R: So, when it comes to involvement, it's irrelevant whose choice or plan one is going with. Either a student or a teacher could have suggested an idea and there could have been engagement either way.

Maybe we can stop at this point? It's been a very rich and complex conversation! I'm noting some questions for reflection below:

1. What does it mean to be at the 'centre' in an interdependent and intricately connected world full of other living beings?
2. What creates the dichotomy of teacher and student, and is it possible for us to challenge and break this distinction?
3. What makes learning accessible for all children?
4. How can resistance and authority be addressed in educational spaces?
5. What could learning for overall well-being imply?



W(hole)istic Education
Thinking the Psychic Revolution in Question

LIONEL CLARIS

Two years ago, I contributed to a series of emails over several weeks amongst 150 Krishnamurti 'educators' around the world. This online 'dialogue' had been ignited by the question of what K would call his schools today. After reading it all I felt compelled to offer a different reading of the relationship between K and 'alternative education' in general, and 'holistic education' in particular, because the latter was largely uncritically equated to K's teachings. I will make the case that it is essential to conceive of Krishnamurti education as distinct because its intent is of an altogether different nature.

My connection to the Krishnamurti world is that I was incredibly fortunate first to be a student at Brockwood Park School and, afterwards, had returned to be a teacher. In this contribution my aim is to deconstruct the notion of 'holistic education' as I investigate the meaning of the related notion of 'wholeness'. I do so in the context of Krishnamurti's educational vision and consider that its essence lies in its concern with an inner revolution, which has come under question in recent times.

Is Krishnamurti's pedagogy holistic?

To start with it seems that we must clarify what K might have meant by 'holistic'. My sense is that it is a jump to assume that K's use of the term is the same as in 'holistic education', even though there is some connection between them. The point is not only to see where the two overlap but, more importantly, where they do not. Even though Krishnamurti does use the word 'holistic' from time to time—and the word 'whole' much more often—it seems to me critical to question what is meant by 'wholeness'. I fear that such a notion may become all too idealistic, forgetting the quality of 'the unknown' that can be associated with it.

In his comprehensive study Holistic Education, Scott Forbes (former director of Brockwood Park School) analyses six thinkers in order to present its 'ideas and nature'. Significantly, Krishnamurti is not among them. A perusal of the contents of this study reveals, perhaps unsurprisingly, that none of these thinkers seem to have been interested in a psychic revolution. Of course, 'holistic education' is intent on what it calls 'ultimacy'. But even in the psychological context—for example in Abraham Maslow's notion of 'self-actualization'—it appears to be in many ways at odds with K's questioning of the 'self'. Could it be, then, that this inner revolution is the distinctive and central piece of a K education? After all, Krishnamurti did publish a book entitled The Only Revolution (1969) in which such an 'interior change' is front and centre.

One of the crucial questions is how this 'revolution' relates to the idea of 'wholeness'. My source of inspiration in offering a possible answer is one of K's most concise and notable statements on education: 'The Intent of the Schools'. I was lucky to come across it when I was a student at Brockwood. In the last paragraph, K concludes with the clarity that is one of his trademarks:

> This whole movement of inquiry into knowledge, into oneself, into the possibility of something beyond knowledge, brings about naturally a psychological revolution, and from this comes inevitably a totally different order in human relationship, which is society. The intelligent understanding of all this can bring about a profound change in the consciousness of mankind.

So, it is not an 'alternative' that K wants to provide in his schools, but perhaps the alternative to what schools are usually assumed to be about: knowledge. What could be the alternative to knowing? That is, the alternative to conditioning that accompanies any accretion of knowledge. While K's views may seem at first to align with the broad definition of 'holistic education' as the development of the whole person, it is a stretch to presume that such development leads to the kind of psychological revolution K is explicitly after.

Allow me to offer a brief reading of the five preceding paragraphs of that Krishnamurti educational statement in order to clarify what he might have meant by 'whole' and 'holistic'. Let us consider the first two paragraphs:

> It is becoming more and more important in a world that is destructive and degenerating that there should be a place, an oasis, where one can learn a

way of living that is whole, sane and intelligent. Education in the modern world has been concerned with the cultivation, not of intelligence, but of intellect, of memory and its skills. In this process little occurs beyond passing information from the teacher to the taught, the leader to the follower, bringing about a superficial and mechanical way of life. In this there is little human relationship.

Surely a school is a place where one learns about the totality, the wholeness of life. Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the taught explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their behaviour. From this they begin to discover their own conditioning and how it distorts their thinking. This conditioning is the self to which such tremendous and cruel importance is given. Freedom from conditioning and its misery begins with this awareness. It is only in such freedom that true learning can take place. In this school it is the responsibility of the teacher to sustain with the student a careful exploration into the implications of conditioning and thus end it.

What is the 'wholeness of life' that K is talking about here? Perhaps the most problematic assumption amounts to the anthropomorphism of wholeness. So that 'holistic education' tends to reduce the wholeness in question to 'the whole person'. The point, on the contrary, seems to be the active questioning of such a construct. To do so, K is here emphasizing the relational aspect of the process of what we might call the deconditioning of the person.

As both David Bohm and Krishnamurti were fond of doing, it is sometimes enlightening to consider the original meaning of words. The etymology of 'alternative' means 'offering one or the other of two.' If most schools focus on 'the outer', bringing 'the inner' into the picture is indeed a more complete and whole approach to education. As such, the relationship between 'the outer' and 'the inner' becomes particularly important. However, K's emphasis is not so much on 'the inner' as an object to be known, but on ending conditioning. Cultivating knowledge matters, of course, yet bringing about "freedom from the known" is what is at stake and that is, once again, the alternative at issue. K poses the question clearly: "So, can this be done in this school? Cultivate knowledge and at the same time, bring about freedom from knowledge?" ('Discussion 1 on Educational Centres', J. Krishnamurti in discussion in Malibu, 8 March 1974)

Questioning the self as it manifests in the known

I understand that varied conceptions of 'holistic education' include the cultivation of 'inner' traits, but as far as I can see, they are not explicitly about ending the self. Often enough, they are about doing quite the opposite. Think of all the 'alternative' approaches that go by the label of 'learner-centred education'. Instead, let me paraphrase what Bill Taylor (former director of Brockwood) used to tell the staff: "What we want to impart to students is not self-confidence, but confidence without a self."

It seems that by appealing to the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the student, K is trying to address the false distinction between 'the one who knows' and 'the one who doesn't', as a way to end conditioning. Inasmuch as "truth is a pathless land", it seems nevertheless that it is via a relationship that values or demonstrates an appreciation for the unknown that truth might be accessed. Krishnamurti goes on to say:

A school is a place where one learns the importance of knowledge and its limitations. It is a place where one learns to observe the world not from any particular point of view or conclusion. One learns to look at the whole of man's endeavour, his search for beauty, his search for truth and for a way of living without conflict. Conflict is the very essence of violence. So far education has not been concerned with this, but in this school our intent is to understand actuality and its action without any preconceived ideals, theories or belief which bring about a contradictory attitude toward existence.

What seems to be meant by 'whole' here is the profound questioning of the separation between the observer and the observed. So, it is the observer, the thinker, the person who thinks he or she knows, that is in part being questioned. Most 'alternative' education gives credence to some version of 'experiential knowledge'—that knowledge should come from experience rather than be intellectually digested. K too is after a type of intelligence distinct from the intellect, but his endeavour, however, is to challenge the notions of both an 'experiencer' and of 'knowledge'. Indeed, it is essential to clarify at this juncture that questioning the separation between the observer and the observed implies not only questioning the knower but the known as well. For the illusionary hierarchy between the observer and the observed is perhaps best cleared by the affirmation of the coincidence of their respective w(hole).

K points out that, "So far education has not been concerned with this." Is he wrong? I see no evidence that outside the K schools there are other

educational institutions explicitly dedicated to a mission of "freedom from the known." Some educationalists like Eleanor Duckworth (of Harvard University) may seem to come close. She speaks of "the virtues of not knowing" and differentiates such a virtue from the automatic acquisition of information and knowing the right answer. Yet even here we don't find an explicit intention to be free of conditioning. If K is wrong and there are other schools that have this vision, then perhaps they should all join forces. For it seems today more than ever, as he himself said, "the world is on fire."

> The school is concerned with freedom and order. Freedom is not the expression of one's own desire, choice or self-interest. That inevitably leads to disorder. Freedom of choice is not freedom, though it may appear so; nor is order conformity or imitation. Order can only come with the insight that to choose is itself the denial of freedom.

Here we find what is perhaps the most counter-intuitive and controversial, but also the most significant, affirmation in this statement. Namely, "that to choose is itself the denial of freedom." This gets to the core of the 'psychological revolution' K is after. Choosing takes place from knowledge, whereas the freedom K is talking about is freedom from that very same knowledge. And what kind of order comes out of this freedom? I would say that such order is not the idealised 'whole' we find in 'holistic education' because such 'w(hole)ness' cannot be known. Yet, crucially, the point is that it can be thought, even if it is most often not. And that this thinking is the creative selfless experience of an 'other order'. Thinking at this stage becomes in part thinking the failure of thought itself to think the observed.

K's notion of freedom indirectly questions today's increasing understanding of education as a commercial product to choose in the seemingly ever-expanding global market. K schools are not immune to this predicament. Though, arguably the way the schools in the West and the schools in India are having to deal with it is diametrically opposed. The point, however, is that from the perspective of respecting The Teachings, opposites coincide. Indeed, it seems both sides have to make sure they are imbued with K's pedagogy but for obverse reasons. Inasmuch as they have to figure out where they fit in on the rich marketplace of 'progressive' educational institutions, K schools in the West (Brockwood and Oak Grove) are having to resist the temptation to reduce 'wholeness' to a marketable commodity that competes with what is on offer at other 'alternative schools'. To the extent that the K schools in India are largely elite places they may not have to contend for

students, but they are not any less exposed to the danger of watering down K's message precisely because of their relative success. Either way, then, given that all K schools need to stay true to their roots it seems we should double down on what seems to be a rather unique mission.

Editors' Note: Lionel Claris's complete article was originally more than twice the length that can be printed here. Hence, we have only printed an edited version of the first part of the article in which he initiates an inquiry into the unique nature of K's educational vision, drawing on Krishnamurti's educational statement quoted in this article. In the longer essay he goes on to further develop his analysis and insights and to provide a more detailed response to the varied judgments of the Krishnamurti schools as well as K's vision. You will also find out why the article is called 'W(hole)istic Education'. Readers are invited to access the complete article online at the link given below. https://www.kfistudy.org/doc/Claris%20L._K%20Journal%2023_W(hole)istic%20Education_final.pdf

The Role of Imagination in Perception

NINA MECAGNI

The land on which Oak Grove school is situated is a numinous place to learn, work and educate future generations. A place we are invited to inhabit for the day and participate in creating and accessing the common ground of real-time awareness with students. In all honesty, asking young students to direct their attention to a single subject for a reasonable amount of time is the most challenging aspect of being an educator. It is not because they do not want to learn or are not curious about the subject matter but it has to do with anxiety fuelled by an imagined perception of oneself that says, "I do not think I can do…(fill in the blank)".

We frequently have the good fortune of meeting opportunities to look at deeper truths and the illusory nature of what we perceive about ourselves, our abilities, and others. These openings emerge throughout the day. Invitations like these require an attentive mind, profound sensitivity, and vulnerability to engage. They are the wealthiest learning opportunities due to the transformative potential of Oak Grove's holistic attitude towards education. These moments offer the possibility of moving beyond the binary of past and future.

Students come forward with their concerns not because they seek a solution but because they seek a witness to their emerging ability to self-correct and regain balance. Oak Grove is a supportive environment for students and staff alike because of the space we hold to enquire, experiment, make mistakes, build tolerance for failure, and be humble enough to try again. This environment is essential for building strong creativity muscles and honouring processes over the end product.

In the third-grade classroom for example, enquiry might take the form of a skit, silent meditation, a poem, illustration, written reflection or a friendship agreement detailing what support students need in their friendships. Together, we learn through nurturing innate curiosity, utilizing discernment, gently provoking each other's defences, revealing our assumptions and biases, and challenging perceptions we held that we did not know we carried. Awareness of the role thought and imagination play in shaping our sense of reality can be a necessary discomfort. As David Bohm explains, "we are conditioned to resist seeing that this is happening."

We must question the presence of imagination in shaping what we perceive as reality before reacting to that perception. We learn that it is in the holding of contradictions that meaning eventually comes forward because, in doing so, one can reflect, and that which is in flux can take solid form. Imagination has little chance of unfolding meaning if that undergoing is truncated or destroyed. A person's full potential is not knowable in its emergent state.

A vital part of conflict resolution is to watch for the 'fix-it' mentality. Sometimes this mindset is helpful, but complex cultural issues require more than a tiny adjustment. Disrupting destructive patterns in our society requires a creative response capable of giving birth to a new consciousness. When we create psychological space and strengthen our tolerance for ambiguity, we can gain new understanding by observing the unfolding feelings and perceptions of ourselves and others. This process gets derailed by reaching for a tidy conclusion that restores comfort in the known, even if it's false. That is where the danger lies.

The brain needs security to function, is uncomfortable with not knowing, and uses images from our collective consciousness to generate a version of reality that feels known and comfortable. It sometimes gets it right and sometimes wrong, the latter contributing to the illusion of separateness, whether we are aware of it or not.

Our visual perception depends on imagination to create the illusion of an open field of view. There are blind spots in our field of vision where the nerve endings enter the retina. Our imagination fills in the gaps in vision without sensors with imagery pulled from memory. This process generates the appearance of a seamless whole. Ever wonder why you can see your nose when you close one eye but cannot see it when both eyes are open? Perceiving movement was essential to human survival, so our imagination blocked our noses to create an unobstructed view.

Likewise, similar involuntary imaginative effects create a narrative or patterns out of seemingly unrelated bits of tacit visual and psychological information with amodal perception. This is not a problem as long as we know this process is happening. On the other hand, there are ways we consciously use imagination to help students visualize symbolic imagery for phonological and orthographic processing when teaching reading and spelling. It is a potent tool when used in this capacity.

> We are infusing our imagination, our past, our knowledge into what we see…

> that isn't necessarily bad; it may be very necessary in many contexts. However, when we fail to see this happening, we are in danger. Especially if there is resistance to seeing it, and we are conditioned to resist seeing that this is happening. That's really when the self-deception arises.
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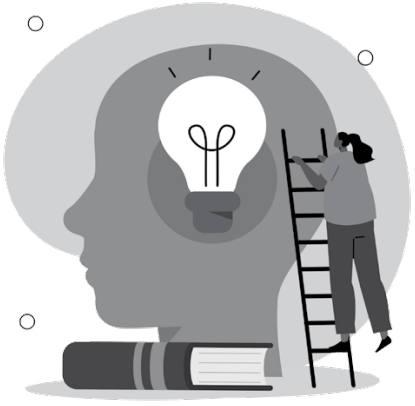
> *Thought as a System*, David Bohm

Reality is undivided wholeness; imagination creates the illusion of separation. It shapes thoughts and beliefs about who we are and what we can and cannot do. Starting life as conscious beings in the anthropocentric era makes it challenging to imagine a reality where humans are not separate and superior to nature. Mostly, this perspective is accepted as 'how it is' because it's how it is perceived, but the two are not the same. Through awareness of how perception is constructed and sustained through our imaginative faculty, we could reclaim imagination's creative potential to envisage a collective consciousness that recognizes itself as part of a network of intelligence rather than the source of it.

What creates meaning in our lives? In the knowledge era, there is much information, but more meaning or correlation is needed. If we are unaware of the role of imagination in our lives, we may view the invocation of imagination as a waste of time and energy. The general sentiment seems to be, 'why imagine when you can know?' But imagination shapes our visual and psychological perceptions in ways few of us are aware of. This is because its role is accepted seamlessly as 'reality'. Einstein explained, "Imagination is more important than knowledge because knowledge is limited". This quote suggests that imagination is unlimited in its capacity. Awareness of how imagination informs our visual and psychological perception of our world and who we are develops a deeper awareness of its emergence in thought. This may be an excellent place to start if one needs clarification.

Future generations may find themselves at a nexus point where society switches to a more intelligent design that will reorient the primitive brain from fighting over scarcity to optimizing for creativity. This moment is an opportunity to ask—what quality of being, thinking, and awareness can an educator participate in co-creating with students and everyone else on campus to meet challenges we cannot predict? No one knows, but that should not stop us from asking questions. Since all of life is learning, we can confidently say that students need strong creativity muscles to flex in the face of current and forthcoming challenges and a quiet, attentive mind receptive to truth.

The work of Krishnamurti is like a massive window into the imagination. It opens a reciprocal relationship with life and all the things we encounter within it freshly and with the appropriate level of uncertainty. We must not take anything for granted, but reflect on how we educate ourselves, and come to students more completely. We must be free to change how we educate future generations in ways beyond what we have already imagined. As educators, we must lovingly care for the fertile ground from which creativity spawns. As futurist Buckminster Fuller explained, "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something", first imagine, then "build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."



Integrating Krishnamurti's Teachings with the Syllabus

My Experiments in Economics and Business Studies Classes

MEENA G

Children today appear very different from what we were at their age. I once happened to see a video of J Krishnamurti addressing a group of young children. The children were neatly dressed, polite, paid keen attention to Krishnaji's talk and were respectful towards him. A section of them actively participated in the discussion with him.

This made me wonder about the bygone era when (as I recollect) we listened, imbibed, reflected, learned and shaped ourselves. We were perhaps less under pressure from our peers. The students we encounter today seem unlike us. Torn between conflicting worlds of home and school, distracted and dependent on gadgets, I wonder if they are slowly becoming unmindful, oblivious of what is going on around them? How do we get them to be mindful of their behaviour, feelings, emotions, their environment and of their attitude towards thinking and learning? How do we help them to make sense of the complex world we live in?

This article explores some ways that we as teachers might help students find Krishnamurti's teachings to be meaningful and enable them to reflect on challenges they will face in their lives. More specifically, I will consider how his teachings may be embedded in the disciplines we teach, and especially in my subject which is Business Studies and Economics. These are skill-based subjects in which the course aims to build critical thinking and communication skills, apart from their inherent core content. A question that concerns me is, 'how can we integrate Krishnamurti's approach within the ambit of the syllabus?'.

Critical thinking as a goal

'Critical thinking' is a buzzword in education. According to Robert Ennis, critical thinking means, "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." The goals that educational systems across the world draw up are encapsulated in Bloom's revised taxonomy, which brings focus on higher order thinking skills—analysis, evaluation, and creation—that go beyond remembering, understanding, and applying.

Among the aims of Economics and Business studies is that of inculcating critical thinking abilities such as:

- Identifying the key focus or underlying questions in an issue
- Analyzing arguments
- Asking questions to clarify and/or challenge conclusions

Krishnamurti and critical thinking

The process of questioning helps to build these critical thinking skills. This is something that we notice when we listen to or read Krishnamurti. It manifests itself in every one of his talks, commentaries, and dialogues, in which he emphasizes the art of questioning. He asks, "Can we find out the right way of questioning so that intelligence can arise?" (Krishnamurti, 'The Art of Questioning', Seminar at Brockwood Park, 12 September 1978)

I believe that students can be helped to develop these skills by closely watching Krishnamurti's videos or reading a selected text as a precursor to introducing some key topics in my subject. Some topics that require a deeper understanding of issues include 'market failure' (in economics) as well as 'ethics' (in business studies). To gain a broad perspective and become aware of the tools for such deeper analysis one can involve students in reading Krishnamurti's commentaries or watching a video.

For example, chapter 54 from the book, *The Whole Movement of Life is Learning*, titled 'If You Hurt Nature, You Are Hurting Yourself', provides an apt backdrop for introducing topics such as 'negative externality in the form of pollution' or 'sustainable development'. Some of the key questions for discussion under these topics are: a) what is the implication when the polluters make decisions based only on the profits derived from production but do not consider the indirect cost to those harmed by pollution? b) why is protecting nature and increasing forest cover now an important parameter of development and a vital component in calculating Green GDP? Krishnamurti's writing places these questions in the broader perspective of the relationship of humans to nature. In addition, a video that is relevant for getting a broader perspective on the topics of 'economic growth', 'common access resources' and 'threats to sustainability' is the one titled 'How is one to live on Earth without destroying its beauty?'. One can then engage in a more meaningful cost–benefit analysis of the compulsions of the rapid economic growth at the cost of the environment.

Krishnamurti's writing may also be used to enable students to discern some specific abilities in his approach to various human issues. For instance, to get a nuanced sense of ethics in the context of social work, students of business studies can be asked to read Chapter 7 from *Commentaries on Living—Series 3*, titled 'Won't you join our animal welfare society?'. Krishnamurti describes a person

who comes to him with a request to join their animal welfare society. As the conversation moves on, he identifies key terms that are pertinent to the situation, like 'ambition', 'cooperation' and 'love', and raises some critical questions. He asks, "which is the true beginning of any action: is it love, or the capacity to organize?" He questions whether 'ambition' can be the source of true action and cooperation, and states at one point that 'co-operation comes naturally and easily when we love what we are doing; and then cooperation is a delight.' He further questions whether the person who has come to solicit his endorsement is using the animal welfare society to serve her own ambitions and as a means of self-aggrandizement. Through this exchange we discern Krishnamurti's keen observation of people, how he defines terms, analyses loosely used ethical vocabulary and deals with equivocations by raising uncomfortable questions that bring hidden motivations to the surface.

Critical thinking in action

As a teacher of these disciplines, I have tried to draw on Krishnamurti's approach and get the students to realise that the first step of critical thinking is asking the right questions in order to understand the complexity of socio-economic issues. My class often begins with students reading the current economics or business news. Then each student comes up with a question pertaining to the news article. In the first few weeks, the students struggle to frame good questions; then they gradually move to more open-ended questions, which eventually lead to rich discussions amongst themselves. Sometimes questions are left unanswered, and students are encouraged to probe into these on their own.

One such class dealt with the slow but steady rise in demand for electric vehicles (EVs). We asked: is this as beneficial as it is projected to be? Initially, the discussion began with profits earned by MNCs producing EVs and how eventually petrol and diesel driven vehicles would lose their markets. Then they identified the stakeholders who would benefit and those who would lose. Initially it was the typical stakeholders that were brought up: customers, EV car manufacturers, petrol/diesel car manufacturers, governments, and the automobile industry. The discussion moved to identifying the monopolistic market structure that the automobile sector increasingly reflects. The discussion also included how the entry of auto MNCs had nudged regional car manufacturers like Ambassador and Premier Padmini out of the Indian market. This also made the students compare the purchasing power of different classes of people then and now. All this led to a recognition of the widening inequality in our society, wherein it is the high-net-worth individuals who buy EVs, pushing up these vehicles into the luxury car segment.

We also delved into further questions such as: who could own EVs, why were EVs expensive, and to what extent EVs reduced pollution compared to petrol/diesel cars, and so on. One of the students shared his knowledge about the manufacturing of batteries for EVs. He explained how the composition of the battery, and the extraction and manipulation of its components also contribute to carbon emission; apart from the production process of these batteries not being cost effective. This was followed by a discussion on asymmetrical information in the market, leading to uninformed choices by the stakeholders and how this too has made EVs unaffordable for consumers of lower-income categories.

I believe this session helped my students to understand how global issues in economics are complex, and that these are better comprehended through group discussions, in which we raise questions, share relevant information, and begin to understand the many interconnected dimensions of the issue. Through this, the art of questioning deepens and widens the students' outlook and they also learn to feel for underprivileged members of society.

Communication skills

Krishnamurti was a communicator *par excellence*, and communication is a vital topic in Business Studies. Students pursuing Business Studies need to learn to be effective communicators. And for effective communication, first and foremost it is important to listen. Krishnamurti has posed the challenge of listening as follows:

> How do you listen? Do you listen with your projections, through your ambitions, desires, fears, anxieties, through hearing only what you want to hear, only what will be satisfactory…? If you listen through the screen of your desires, then you obviously listen to your own voice; you are listening to your own desires.
>
> *The Book of Life,* J. Krishnamurti

Listening intently leads to probing for deeper understanding of an area of discussion. Clarifying assumptions by asking questions leads to determining the specifics of the issue being discussed and reduces judgement bias. Through the way discussions are conducted, we could get the students to appreciate that communication is never a one-sided affair. It is a two-way process, where both the speaker and the listener are expected to be responsible towards each other while communicating, and so give their whole attention on the conversation. Whenever this takes place, each one's learning is extended and deepened. As Krishnamurti says:

> Communication is not only the exchange of words, however articulate and clear they may be; it is much deeper than that. Communication is learning from each other, understanding each other.
>
> *The Whole Movement of Life is Learning,* J. Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti also emphasizes that "one's mind must be quiet; otherwise, it cannot listen". Minutes of silence before the class begins or towards the end of the class could enable students to understand

the value of silence in dealing with any challenging topic under discussion with a calm attitude. A quiet nature walk after an intense discussion in class also helps.

Questioning the premise of economics

The premise on which the subject of economics is structured is: 'Man, as a rational being, makes choices to solve the problem of scarcity.' Numerous theories based on a range of assumptions, mathematical models, and graphs are used to focus on and solve global economic problems of eliminating the inequality gap, ensuring fair trade, regu-lating markets and ensuring balanced growth.

The reality is that the premise itself has flaws. Krishnamurti's commentaries gently point out that complex global problems of inequality, of war, of assuring a decent livelihood for different groups of people, have dragged on over centuries. The reason being that fragmented minds, which are ever in conflict, only find fragmented, divisive solutions. Krishnamurti has pointed out:

> Man, you, human beings right throughout the world, are in conflict, in battle with himself, with his neighbour, with the world, with the environment of which he is part. And until we understand this problem and find out for ourselves whether there is a possibility of completely ending conflict, totally, then we shall never be able to live at peace with ourselves and so with society.

Through this statement, I understand that we can solve global issues only when we break free from the conflicts of the mind; this means letting go of the identities we are holding on to—identities that are national, social, economic, historical, or related to language, race, religion and community. This too needs to be communicated to the students.

One of the ways of making students aware of this could be by using role plays. For instance, the impact of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war can be explored in this way. Getting students to role-play different stakeholders of the warring nations, and their supporters and detractors, would bring out the irrational, divisive side of human beings. It would also enable them to question the factors behind such a man-made catastrophe, with its severe humanitarian, economic and environmental consequences. This will help them understand that economics is just a tool; but the real action of stopping such wars would happen only when human minds see the falsity of their identifications and negate divisions.

They can thus be made to ponder on the premise of economics: are human beings really rational? Is scarcity a delusional concept? After all, rational beings can help pool all the resources and meet everyone's need. Rational beings would not be greedy. Rational beings live in the present and their decisions are aimed at meeting their needs right now. They would draw only as much resources from their environment as are required, and not go on producing and accumulating goods that are not in fact required. They would let the other resources remain. As Gandhi had affirmed, "The Earth has enough for everyone's need; but not enough for everyone's greed".

This is a theme I initiate as a discussion after my introductory class every year to different batches. While dealing with the topic of political and economic systems, especially socialism and capitalism, I get the students to re-visit these questions. I have often had the response that Socialism, which aims at welfare for all people through the decisions of a few leaders, is definitely not rational. Then I push the students to think further whether a government or authority can aim for the common welfare by supressing individual needs and desires. This leads to a discussion on communism, and we look at Mao's policies and their irrationality too. When discussing dictatorships, the horror of the Holocaust comes up. Eventually we identify that irrational conditioning of one sort or another underlies all these systems. Then we explore the ways in which conditioning happens in the current forms of capitalism, where profit motive is an over-riding driving force and a consumeristic mindset lets us accept exploitation of both resources and labour as long as the product meets our wants and needs. I try to point out that it is this deep human conditioning that shapes our education systems too and sustains the factors of conflict and division.

Integrating Krishnamurti's teachings with our subjects

I have found that this experimental approach—of weaving Krishnamurti's teachings in with the topics I teach—is a slow process, and its outcomes are uncertain. It has worked well with some batches, with some batches less so. But nevertheless, it has been quite a learning experience for me as a teacher. For me this was a step towards making Krishnamurti relevant for our students, who want to find solutions to the problems around them. Each subject can be a vehicle for bringing in aspects of these teachings. However, it requires that the mind of the teacher is also not caught in a narrowly conditioned view of her subject, and she strives to uncover aspects of his teaching that can be applied to themes, topics, and questions within the subject. It would then mean that the teacher too is learning along with her students.

A Living and Learning Space
Approaches to Education in a Krishnamurti School[1]

VAISHNAVI NARAYANAN

I have been a teacher for the past eighteen years, fifteen of which have been at a Krishnamurti School in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India at The School (Krishnamurti Foundation of India). When I chose to become a teacher, it was driven neither by an ambition to teach nor by the yearning to 'make a difference' in the lives of young people. One can say that it was perchance a mere happening that somehow became intrinsic to who I am today, as a person. My tryst with Krishnamurti also was as a matter of chance and not borne out of a conscious seeking around what he had to say about life at large. In fact, I came upon his teachings when I joined The School (Krishnamurti Foundation of India), a school hidden away in the deep recesses of shade and beauty amidst dark woods, an oasis in a concrete jungle, a happening that changed my life. In the verdant ambiance of the school and the bedrock of Krishnamurti's teachings that form the core of the school's approach to education, I have learnt much, and I have grown tremendously as an educator as well as a person. The experience of being touched by Krishnamurti is no ordinary experience; it is deep and moving. It shook up the very ground of my beliefs and nudged me, gently but firmly, out of my comfort zone, out of my ready acceptance of answers, challenged me to examine myself, ask questions, reflect on my life and how I live it. This journey of self-exploration continues, and the intent of my paper is to give an understanding—a glimpse—of how the philosophy of a Krishnamurti school finds its expression in the structures that have been evolved for the learning of the adult and the child in this place called The School.

Nature: An Extension of our existence

What is a teacher? It is the greatest profession in the world, though the least respected, for if he [she] is deeply and seriously concerned, the teacher is bringing about the un-conditioning of the human brain; not only his own brain but the brains of the students.

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In the quiet of the mornings, in the crunch of the fallen leaves below my feet, in the colours of the sunset and the song of the birds, I have found solace in my moments amidst nature. To be aware of the smells of the earth, the feel of the cool morning breeze, or to watch as the beautiful kingfisher gets ready to take flight, is to be alive. Krishnamurti has often spoken about the importance of nature and our relationship with life around us, in all its forms.

As a teacher, I have found immense value in coming in early every day of the working week onto the school campus. It is a time to just be by myself and enjoy the solitude of the place. It is that time before the rush of the day begins, before the students come in and the chaos of the day takes over, before the routines and schedules demand my attention; before all that. It is a time to connect with myself and listen to my thoughts as each vies for my attention. It is in that flurry of thoughts that I allow myself to settle down, to quieten and just be. In that moment, I turn outwards, to nature, to all the beauty that is around me, beauty that reaches out to me and makes me come alive with a sense of wonder. I have realized over the years how much I value this time, as it is more important than any of the work I do in school; these precious minutes enable me to connect with myself.

I also take my students frequently on nature walks around the campus whenever we feel the need to disconnect from everything and connect with ourselves. The subject, nor the time of the day, do not matter. What matters is the need to be quiet and observe, around us, but of ourselves too. We usually go and find a space to be alone, to sit under a tree or an open space, looking around, trying to listen, not necessarily to identify everything that we hear and see but to allow for that space to be attentive. I remember how once, one of my colleagues, in his earnestness to show a certain bird on the tree raised his voice to get everyone's attention, and a child said, "Anna (that is how male teachers are addressed in school) if you shout, the bird will fly away." It is in the recognition of the quiet that attention takes birth. We observe all that we see and hear, appreciate, and then try and understand it, together.

The school trips that we go on with students always have an element of spending time outdoors, of being with nature and with oneself. There are night-walks that students go on, in complete silence, for one to recognize and be aware of what one feels. The stars above, the shadows of the trees, the hooting of the night owl, all of it becomes part of that experience, something that is part of our being and not outside it. The fear that one has of the dark is unravelled and understood. As one middle school child once said, "I realize that the dark is nature's way of turning out the lights!" Simple words that make me ask myself about my role as the adult in the lives of students. Krishnamurti says,

> Nature is part of our life. We grew out of the seed, the earth, and we are part of all that, but we are rapidly losing the sense that we are animals like the others. Can you have a feeling for a tree, look at it, see the beauty of it, listen to the sound it makes? Can you be sensitive to the little plant, a little weed, to that creeper growing up the wall, to the light on the leaves and the many shadows? One must be aware of all this and have that sense of communion with nature around you.
>
> Krishnamurti, 2006, Ch. 54

Over the years, I have discovered that my role as the adult in the child's life is to carefully nurture the space for a student to grow and be their own person. That, by itself, begins the process of self-discovery. To help articulate and express what one feels in the midst of nature, students are often encouraged to write in their journals when they return from their walk. They also choose to illustrate what they have experienced. The writing and the illustration could be factual in terms of what they saw and identified, or simply be an expression of their self-reflection. The intent is to help them watch their thinking, to question and understand oneself in this pause. Students are encouraged to read these pieces of writing and share with the entire group so that everyone gets a glimpse of this thought process. These are spaces of introspection that allow for immense learning for both the teacher and the student.

How often have we made an effort to sit with our backs against the trunk of a tree? To just lean back and look at the sky, to be quiet, watch, and take in what nature offers to us, unconditionally. To be able to appreciate these nuances with a gentleness and sensitivity, makes us alive to other relationships that we experience in our lives. If we cannot relate to nature, we cannot relate to each other.

To respect nature, to have a sense of wonder for it, is to respect the whole of life. In school, students enjoy the activity of doing gardening together, of watching a plant take life from seed. The idea of taking care of something and nurturing it, nurtures the quality of attention in them as they carefully observe the changes they see in the plant, the colours of the flowers, the texture of the bark or the smell of the leaves. All this is energizing in its own quiet way. When there is conflict inside or outside of them, students seek quiet. It helps to take that pause when they are distracted or when they feel the need to be by themselves.

The act of saving an ant from drowning or putting a caterpillar back on a leaf nurtures a sense of care and affection for all living beings. When we learn to appreciate that which is around us, we learn to value others and ourselves too. It is this relationship we have with nature that leads to growth as sensitive and caring individuals.

Conversation: An opportunity to listen

As a teacher, I have found that the most meaningful conversations happen when there is no context, or any agenda to them. Talking to students at different times of the day, through the different activities that happen, creates the space for conversing and examining ideas and questions on one's mind. It is not always necessary that the adult initiates these conversations. It is sometimes the students who themselves take the initiative to begin a conversation. Conversations bring to our attention the importance of listening, of being open to examining something together. Conversations also do not have to be complete or resolve a question but can leave one with further questions that can be pursued as one deems fit.

In school, there are structures that enable a directed conversation with students in the space of circle time conversations or culture classes, where a topic is taken up and discussed by raising questions for the group. The group decides together to come up with and engage in a topic. Examining fear, anger or envy are relevant for any individual, adult, or child. These spaces create the groundwork for listening and understanding together, for each one to bring in their perspective to the discussion. In the listening, there is an unravelling and an attempt to go deeper into the questions that are raised.

In a circle time around the question of fear, one student asked me, "Akka [name given to female staff with Anna for male], what are you afraid of?" At that moment, when this question was asked, I realized that I had been caught unawares. I could not say that I had no fears, for that would have been an untruth. I also recognized that while I did not have many of the physical fears that these young people had, it did not imply that I did not have other fears. Fear of others, one's own thoughts, or living up to expectations, are some that came to my mind. It is something that is ingrained in us, possibly because of our experiences in life. The important thing, I realized, was to acknowledge that I had fears, that at a certain level, I was the same as these twelve-year old students who were trying to understand the idea of 'fear'. I was not free of it too and therefore it left me free to examine it along with them. That is the power of conversation and talking together.

At another time, a senior school student, who had just started reading Krishnamurti, asked me my thoughts on 'unity' and the quality of not being 'divisive.' Words that have often been explained and understood from a certain location in society. I had to consciously put aside my understanding of it and look at it afresh. This meant asking questions of myself, holding my convictions tentatively, and engaging actively with the idea. Asking each other, clarifying, and disagreeing—each of these are integral to a conversation. This is an important aspect of talking together, as it helps move one's location in the understanding of an idea and explore it as fresh, unknown territory. This also demands a serious engagement by us and brings in much needed width and depth into one's exploration and inquiry. As Krishnamurti points out,

> And to listen is only possible when you put aside your particular opinion, your particular knowledge or problem, your conclusions; when you're free to listen, not interpreting, not judging, not evaluating, but actually the art of listening. To listen with great care, attention, with affection. And if we have such an art, if we have learnt such... rather, if you are capable of such listening, then communication becomes very, very simple. There'll be no misunderstanding.
>
> Krishnamurti, 1977

To ask a question and to listen to each other is a quality that is encouraged in school, even in informal spaces such as the dining hall where we all sit together as teachers and students during breakfast and lunch. Questions around food, choice, leisure, and work surface in the context of eating together. It is much like the discussion one might have at home with one's family. Affection and respect guide these interactions and one learns to agree and disagree in the relationship that one shares with the other.

> A dialogue is very important. It is a form of communication in which question and answer continue until a question is left without an answer. Thus the question is suspended between the two persons involved in this answer and question.
>
> Krishnamurti, Vasanta Vihar, 1984

It is a journey that one undertakes on common ground, knowing that each individual is essentially the same. To traverse this familiar ground and ask questions of each other, to pursue with the serious intent to inquire and not just examine opinions and ideas, is the demand of good dialogue.

Each of the Krishnamurti schools has a Study Centre that attempts to create the space for a serious dialogue amongst the adult community of the school. The Study Centre meetings that happen once a month are a way of coming together to delve into Krishnamurti's teachings. These meetings create a rich ground for serious dialogue between parents and teachers. It gives the much-needed impetus to questions that are not directly connected to the travails that one deals with in life, but to examine these in the context of a Krishnamurti text. Questions on fear, comparison, relationship, and many other themes are taken up in these meetings. The goal is to examine the conflicts we face in our lives, and it is an invitation to come together in conversation. It is also to work with the tentative holding of an idea, of an understanding, of seeing the scope for further and deeper examination of one's deep conditioning with no ideal objective to be reached. The pertinent questioning of one's ideas is a reflection of the work of the school, that it is not just a space of learning for children but also for adults, parents and teachers alike.

The strength of the school's work lies in this invitation it holds for all—students, teachers, and parents—to come together in conversation. This creates the climate for inquiry and helps foster an environment where one can examine the dogmas of beliefs and ideas, handed down through generations, and do so with conviction and without the fear of judgement.

Reflection: The much-needed pause

Krishnamurti says, "We have so committed ourselves in different ways that we hardly have any time for self-reflection, to observe, to study" (Krishnamurti, 2019). A day takes us through myriad experiences, and each of these bring to fore some aspect of our personalities. I use the word 'personality' because we play out that certain personhood in the context of each specific experience. A moment of appreciation, disappointment, anger, or sadness; each of these make us into a certain kind of person at that moment. Does this mean that I am a 'certain' kind of person? Or that I must stay the same through all of my experiences? What does it mean to respond and not react to situations and experiences? Questions like these and more come to us after the moment has passed.

Reflection is that much needed pause that helps us to look at something from outside of us, in a detached sense, from the periphery. When I suggest the word, 'look', it is with the intent to observe oneself closely and objectively in relationship to others and everything. For that to happen, I must be quiet in my mind. A mind that is pre-occupied or caught up with other thoughts will neither have the inclination nor see the importance of this pause.

> Self-reflection is the gateway to freedom. It also brings greater appreciation and enjoyment. We begin to enjoy spending time with our own mind, and we enjoy reflecting on our experience of the teachings. Like the sun emerging from behind the clouds, the teachings of the dharma become clear.
>
> Kongtrul, 2006, p. 14

Spaces in school, such as the staff meetings, have an element of self-reflection in the way questions are taken up and discussed. The reflective exercise of writing down one's questions in thinking or understanding an idea gives direction and clarity to how one would like to take it forward for themselves. Journal writing as an exercise is a good way to articulate this for oneself. I have often recorded my questions and observations in the journal about a class that might have not gone well that week, or my reaction to a colleague's statement, or just to look at my work as a teacher—of what I bring to this space each day. As a group of adults working with young people, it is important that we reflect often, that we go back to structures, practices, methodologies, and pedagogy to see their relevance in our work. It is to push ourselves to ask questions, questions that can also sometimes be difficult, and are a way to discover ourselves. This process of reflection is significant in its purpose for the individual and is essential to my work as a teacher. It is to reiterate that we have to look inward to grow in the space that is outward, to find the joy and immerse ourselves in the act of teaching

instead of just going about our work in a functional manner.

Periodic assemblies in school with students over a Krishnamurti text or any other writing create the space for this reflection. Studying something together and connecting it to observations of oneself gives direction to this reflective exercise. In one such assembly when we looked at 'comparison', there were different responses to one's understanding of the idea of 'comparison'. We sat quietly and noted down our thoughts and when we shared these with each other, we realized that the fear of judgement and expectations one has of oneself pushes one to compare. The act of just sitting quietly and gathering one's thoughts around it helped us to come upon this understanding and to ask further questions for ourselves. The process of reflection is a follow-up to discussion and conversation followed by further inquiry and exploration. New possibilities and thinking emerge as a consequence of this process of reflection. It is this pause, this quiet, that gives the much-needed impetus to move forward.

> Only when the mind is tranquil—through self-knowledge and not through imposed self-discipline—only then, in that tranquility, in that silence, can reality come into being. It is only then that there can be bliss, that there can be creative action.
>
> Krishnamurti, 1949

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Walks with Mina

RAJANI JOOJU

In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks

—John Muir

Throughout my six years at The Valley School, nothing has brought me more happiness than nature walks with children. The Valley is blessed with abundant nature, and we don't miss any opportunity to take our little ones on walks. Nature walks form an integral part of our life here. Working with children of ages seven to nine is extremely rewarding; every new walk reveals a new lesson, a new surprise, and a new way to look at life. It is always such a joy to see the wonder in a child's eye when they see a new mushroom or gasp at a butterfly. Nature walks are where I connect with children the most and explore their love for nature with them. It is our space where we understand nature and our connection to it.

This year Mina, who is ten years old and visually impaired, entered our lives and added a whole new colour to our walks. We welcomed Mina into our environment with open arms. Initially, we were very aware of the new addition to our small family. There is constant worry regarding the unknown. As humans, we fear the unknown and steer clear of unfamiliarity. Pursuing the known seems to be a constant factor in our lives, although we seldom realise the futility of this. As a facilitator, I was preoccupied with and, at times, worried about her nature walks. My mind was constantly flooded with questions about how she would handle the terrain, whether the intent of the walks would come through to her, and whether she would be able to experience this oasis along with the other children.

To my surprise, the anxiety I felt at the beginning of the year eased very quickly. Our walks in the Valley played an essential role in this. Nature has

a way of helping us cope with situations. It teaches us the beautiful art of patience, accepting the unknown, and opening our eyes to new possibilities. Experiencing the Valley has always been tied with the sense of sight, and one takes for granted the role all our other senses play in our day-to-day life. Mina surprised everyone by adapting quickly to our environment. The children were eager to help Mina and were happy to lead her during the walks.

These conversations with her invoke certain questions in my mind. How does she perceive nature? How are these descriptions of sights imprinted in her mind? How is it that this child can feel so much beauty through her other senses?

With the incessant rains in Bangalore, the Valley's water bodies are filled to the brim. With puddles everywhere and the smell of green in the air, we are more conscious and mindful of what we are hearing, smelling, and feeling. Our walks, usually dominated by one sense, are now a mixture of various sensory experiences. It was Mina, however, who opened our hearts to our senses. One day, we walked to Pigs Rock. Seventeen of us were making our way through the thorny bushes and varying terrain to reach the rock. The path was laden with stones and slippery moss after the rain. However, despite the entire route being unfamiliar to her, the unknown terrain did not faze her. She was so excited to follow the new sounds and go on a new adventure with the group. Her palpable joy was infectious and soon the entire group was excitedly making their way to Pigs Rock. Upon arriving there, we removed our footwear and sat on rocks, and later walked in the stream. I can still feel Mina's hand squeeze mine in elation as she felt the soft round pebbles and the cascading water with her feet. We sat in silence near the stream, observing and taking in the various sounds around us.

Mina has boldly taken my hand with no hesitation and climbed mounds of gravel with me, and I too have shared the feeling of exhilaration with her. Another day, it was dark and cloudy, and the children were eagerly waiting for the first drops of rain. There was an unforgettable thrill in the air, and Mina shared the anticipation with the children. She never shows reluctance to walk through thorny bushes and is excited to feel touch-me-not plants. When she feels the dewdrops on the leaves and hugs a tree, her happiness is indescribable.

There is a beautiful sense of curiosity and wonder that has been instilled in the children because of Mina. Seeing Mina tracing her path around the

school, many of the children try to do the same and experience the Valley like her. She learnt to map her daily routes by consistently taking the same path over and over again. Her perseverance is reflected in all her classes. During art classes, she practised outlining the leaf, then filling the insides with colours, and also did some yarn work with the help of her art teacher. Mina's zest for life and magnetic positivity is quick to spread. Whenever she stumbles on her way, she is unperturbed. Whenever she is hurt, she is the first to state that she is alright with a wide smile. Her perseverance is unmatched and amazes me every day. Sights that go unnoticed become a marvel. Senses you never pay attention to become a surprise. You open your heart to new perceptions of the world and experience the world through so many different lenses.

As our walks continue, I attempt to help Mina experience nature through the various sides of the Valley. We smell flowers, hug trees, touch cotton pods, squeeze what the children fondly call 'susu' pods and walk around barefoot. It is hard to explain the feeling of witnessing the children interact with Mina on our walks. Acting as her eyes, they name trees and birds for her, describe the colours around us, and help her 'see' the Valley. Along with her friends, Mina feels the textures of leaves, plays with the prop roots of the Banyan, eats the wild berries, and even tastes the bitter Adhatoda leaves. She loves listening intently to bird sounds with her friends. She is intrigued by the colours of flowers, insects and trees around her and exclaims how beautiful they are.

We speak of 'living in the moment', but I had never truly experienced it until she came into our lives. Being in the present and experiencing the lightness of being is an immeasurable feeling. I do hope that every facilitator has the privilege of getting to experience this with Mina and that she always retains her fearless positive spirit.

> Happiness is strange; it comes when you are not seeking it. When you are not making an effort to be happy, then unexpectedly, mysteriously, happiness is there, born of purity, of a loveliness of being.
>
> —J Krishnamurti

Breathing Life into the Classroom

SANGEETHA M

The morning light creeps in gently into the classroom, warming and awakening the space for another new day. The grade one children slowly trickle in one after the other. Very soon, there is a fully charged room brimming with excitement, energy and laughter. While this may be an invigorating start to the day, it is interesting to note how spontaneously this came to be. It is a rich moment for the children and the teacher to imbibe.

I have often wondered about how the classroom can contain so much energy. Its ability to house the spiking screeches, the deep silences, the engrossed play, the quiet pondering, the bonding conversations, the sincere disagreements and the non-stop flourishing of ideas and questions, all at a unified moment, is metaphoric in many ways.

I have mostly related to the classroom as a physical structure, a minuscule infrastructure that supports the various activities for the children. On the other hand, children relate to it quite differently. They seem instinctively receptive to the multiple possibilities of engaging with the classroom space, breathing life into every nook and corner of the room.

The other day, inside the classroom, a narrow space between the wooden mat holder and the ledge had become an abode for dinosaurs. It began with an animated transformation of a child into a dinosaur. This dinosaur crept towards the chosen place, roaring, and dramatically perched its forelegs on the edge of the mat holder. He then cautiously peeped through the foliage of rolled mats and peered at his classmates. Instantaneously, more children gravitated towards the spot, one after the other, gradually transitioning into dinosaurs. Things went berserk for a while until they could accommodate the rapidly increasing population of dinosaurs. It was amusing to observe how efficiently they used the limited corner space, without widening its periphery, but utilising the area in all its capacities and dimensions-the wall, windows, and much more.

Over the months, the classroom has witnessed its share of order and disorder. A typical scene from a messy and untidy room would include pencils, erasers and crayons scattered on the floor, worksheets lying in tatters and storybooks strewn all over and neglected. A sense of abandonment and lack of care for one's space and resources seem apparent here. On the contrary, there have been times when children have initiated tidying and organizing their space with rigour and ownership. They work on this independently, designate tasks for each other and oversee each other's work. They instantly immerse themselves in what they do. Quite naturally, a rhythm sets in and the children work in harmony. Their perception of order is unique, and it reflects in the way they arrange things. The attention to detail and the revelations that come about at such times are fascinating to watch—discovering a long-lost and disfigured eraser while sweeping out dust from under a shelf were triumphant moments equated to solving a complex mystery! The sheer joy and relief that follows these findings are inevitable. Cleaning becomes a meditative process for them and it goes on for a long time! In the end, the classroom gets a fresh start.

Order and disorder frequent the classroom in different forms and manners. It's often challenging to understand these qualities inside a classroom. I have observed children oblivious to the disarray around them, reading, working or drawing with deep engagement. Understanding how these two components work in the physical environment and one's mind is an intriguing and grounding process. The pause and the 'flowing with the moment' come naturally to children, is even inherent in them.

While the expansive outdoors can be an engaging and fascinating space for children, the classroom becomes a space where they can bring these experiences to build on and reflect. Be it a seed or leaf they want to draw, an ant or millipede they want to build a nest for, a friend to bring and show their classroom to, or when they come running to class to share an exciting discovery or when seeking help, the classroom has been a core resource point. A sense of belonging, familiarity and a perception of reliability seem distinct in the way children relate to the classroom.

By the end of the day, countless ideas and thoughts have moved in and out of the classroom. Varied interactions and explorations have found space inside this room, allowing the children a flexible and creative learning environment. The vibrant aura of the classroom gently calms down as the children depart. At times, after the children leave, I take a moment to pause in the silence of the classroom, watching the drawings and creations of the children adorn its walls—looking forward to another day!

Honesty, Trust and Cooperation

JENNER J PRINCE

Co-operation demands great honesty

—Krishnamurti

Here is a bold claim that is ripe for a healthy discourse: "Everybody lies, essentially about everything. Either verbally or through their actions. Either directly or by omission." Lies, deceit, dishonesty and deception come in an assortment of different skins. Honesty as a virtue is a rare commodity. Why be honest when you can be deceptive and reap incomparable benefits from an interaction? Why choose truth over lies? To me, understanding these questions through the lens of evolution, animal behaviour and a dash of philosophy was truly inspiring. Let us start from scratch and contextualize certain words like 'communication', 'honesty', and 'deception' as they arise in the animal kingdom.

No Man is an Island is the title of a book by John Donne. I have come across a similar phrase in one of my ecology classes: 'No organism exists in isolation'. Interestingly, the first law of ecology confirms this by stating 'Everything is connected to everything else'. So, interactions and interrelations are inevitable. The essence of an interaction is communication. Technically, communication can be termed as 'signalling'. During signalling there is a clear 'sender' and a potential 'receiver'. Depending on their sensory world or their *Umwelt*, organisms can choose the type of signal they send from a diverse toolkit of sensory capabilities. This concept is aptly termed as 'multi-modal signalling'.

Communication can be simple; often involving only one sensory modality or it can be multi-modal, embracing multiple sensory modalities, including chemical, visual, and auditory stimuli. Insects and arachnids often use different signals such as movements, gestures, touch, and even light during courtship. Some spiders dance and jump. Butterflies flit and float in the air. Fireflies light up. Some arachnids touch tails or antennae to communicate during courtship. Each of these signals work to help them recognize others of their kind. In all these modalities, a particular animal can either send an 'honest' signal or a 'dishonest' signal. To put it in simple terms, an honest signal carries 'truth' and a dishonest signal carries 'wilful deception'.

Deception and deceit are widely prevalent in the animal kingdom. In specific cases, the animal that practices dishonesty and deception enjoys anomalous advantage over another. They usually reap short-term benefits. Animals can use deceit defensively to save themselves, to survive in the merciless natural world. Camouflage, which is a type of mimicry, is (usually) a defensive strategy. It is like lying to save your life. But, now let us look at *brood parasitism*. Brood parasitism is an exploitative strategy. One of the common examples is the infamous Asian koel, which exploits the parental care of crows by invading the crow's nest and laying their eggs in it. Koel eggs hatch much earlier than crow eggs. It is observed that sometimes the koel chicks will kick the crow's eggs out of the nest before they could even hatch. There are also instances when the (host) crow has died of pure exhaustion due to the enormous food demand put up by the (parasite) koel chick. Sometimes the other crow chicks have simply died of starvation because the parent crow was busy feeding the koel chick. It is wilful deception of such a high degree that as a child you may start to believe in the notion of 'evil'.

Now let's look at another cheeky liar of the animal kingdom. There is a wily bird in Sub-Saharan Africa that practices what researchers have termed as 'tactical deception'. The fork-tailed drongo is a bird that specializes in auditory mimicry. It possesses an arsenal of more than seventy different types of alarm calls, some of which closely resemble the alarm calls of the animals it is trying to fool and exploit. Alarm calls are essentially warning messages that are broadcast mostly by birds in the presence of a predator. Since survival is of utmost importance, most animals instinctively scamper for the nearest cover when they hear an alarm call. The fork-tailed drongo exploits this instinct in animals. Whenever it sees a tasty snack in the hands of another animal, it sounds a 'false alarm'. Upon hearing the alarm call, the animal drops the treat and scurries to save its life. Of course, leaving the snack unguarded for the drongo to swoop in and steal. The fork-tailed drongo 'lies' so often that researchers have found out that close to one-third of its

diet comes from stolen food. This might sound like a successful strategy, but only for a short term. The victims of the drongo catch up on the lies pretty soon and do not fall for it later on. This is a classic scenario of the 'cry wolf syndrome'.

Lying and deception seems like an easy and powerful strategy in most cases. But in the long run, when it comes to human interactions, it hurts all of us and painfully reminds us of the importance of trust among people in a community. In Prisoner's Dilemma (a hypothetical game), the assumption is that humans as purely rational agents are selfish, and that people will inevitably betray each other for self-interest. This seems to make complete sense when we look at it from a logical point of view. But interestingly, when this experiment was conducted using a random population, it was found that the majority of the participants chose to cooperate more than once, rather than betraying every single time for selfish gains. This is gladly surprising because cooperation beats betrayal, even when betrayal is strongly favoured and incentivized.

The first documented sin in *The Bible* is 'lying'. The devil lied about the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge. In Dante's *Inferno*, 'betrayal' (which is the shattering of trust) is found in the lowest part of the hell, a 'greater evil' and the 'worst of all human sins'. Anyone who has been betrayed, child or adult, will whole-heartedly agree to that, and I believe there is no hierarchy in the emotional hurt caused by an act of betrayal. A small child who is betrayed by his friend will hurt and suffer as much as an adult who is betrayed by their significant other. Betrayal is arguably one of the most painful experiences. And yet we may still choose to trust, knowing full well that betrayal can be lurking around the corner.

Being honest and so, trustworthy, demands great courage. Honesty can be seen as a cornerstone, a precursor to trust. Trust is built on the immovable foundations of honesty and truth. In his book *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, author David Landes gives a convincing account of how some of the most successful, rich, and developed nations scored very high on interpersonal trust among its citizens. They also scored very high on the Happiness Index, showing an air-tight correlation between honesty, trust, and happiness. The author claims that "trust is the only true natural resource".

Sometimes, honesty could be the most uncomfortable state of being we could experience; for we are afraid of revealing ourselves and our thoughts

to others. I would say this is because people are complicated, and trusting someone is a risk. But it is a 'courageous and intelligent' risk. For being honest 'simplifies' us. Quoting J Krishnamurti here:

> Only then, when the mind and the heart are really simple, not encrusted, are we able to solve the many problems that confront us. Simplicity is not merely adjustment to a pattern. It requires a great deal of intelligence to be simple and not merely conform to a particular pattern, however worthy outwardly.

In a school, building this awareness that each of us is very similar, though yet very uniquely different, helps us to reduce prejudices and empathize with each other. Better relationships mean lesser conflict, and that means we can truly focus on cultivating a learning atmosphere together. Expressing oneself honestly in a school environment helps a student or teacher to more readily find their niche in a place. While many animals are known for their ability to adapt and adjust to their surroundings, man is quite infamous for his capability to not just adapt to a particular environment, but also his power to shape the environment by his will and behaviour. So, honesty becomes critical and necessary because it actively reduces miscommunications and misunderstandings. Honesty nurtures trust in our schools. Where there is trust, there is no fear. Cooperation blossoms out of trust. The role of trust in a school is thus huge and should be explored and discussed much more and in greater depth. I believe my sole purpose as an educator should be cultivating the 'extraordinary atmosphere where learning can happen naturally.' Everything else should silently and harmoniously support that purpose. Unsurprisingly, my two favourite quotes complement each other deeply: "Truth is a pathless land"… "And it shall set you free!"

Performance in School

A Critical Examination

PRASHANTH NARASIMHAN

The single major tool in today's world that has come to determine how we (adolescents and adults) understand others as well as ourselves is social media. In this space, *like* and *follow* seem to matter at least as much as, if not more than, *confide* and *support*; such is the power of these online platforms! In fact, so magnetic is its allure that we have stubbornly refused time after time to register what innumerable studies have been trying to tell us, i.e., that social media has an acutely detrimental effect on the emotional well-being of its users. Social media, they say, hijacks our agency to build our own sense of self-esteem and self-worth and places it in the hands of our 'friends' and 'followers' to do that for us. In other words, it tacitly and repeatedly reinforces the message that it is the job of others to judge if my physical appearance passes the test, to decide if my ideas have any substance, and to collectively put a score on anything else I might publicly express.

The pitfalls of inhabiting such an environment over a sustained period of time appear to be undesirable to say the least—be it for ourselves, our children, or indeed our students. It is with this conviction that we have rightly, on more than one occasion, invited behavioural psychologists and counsellors to our school to speak with both children and their parents on the dangers of these online 'communities'.

But could it be that there is also something woven into the fabric of school culture that might have similar implications as the above? Isn't it true that any kind of performance has elements of what's been described above? Be it a sporting competition watched on by enthusiastic students donning different colours, a freshers' programme that brings together the staff and students of the school, or a 'cultural' event that welcomes, in addition to the above, the parents of the children. Could it be that the forces that govern social media and those that guide any event planned with the expectation of an audience have more in common than we might first assume?

Interestingly, the Cambridge Dictionary defines 'performance' as 'the action of entertaining other people'. It may well be that the intent behind the programmes we plan in school goes beyond the goal of entertaining others, but is it not important to pause and consider the impact they might have on the performers' psyche? Do we, as teachers planning such events, ask ourselves what messages we may be communicating overtly and covertly? It is for example not uncommon to say that "there are only four days left before the day of the play" or that the students "need to buck up because we don't want to embarrass ourselves". There are other messages that we might pass on the impact of which may be more subtle: "It's okay, the audience didn't notice" or "You were magnificent! Did you hear the applause at the end?" So how might we come to understand and have a more meaningful relationship with performance?

Shifting the focus

In the lead up to any school function, our rehearsals and practice sessions are attended to with an unflinching eye on the evening of the performance. When the children's attention wavers, for example, we find ourselves reminding them of the fact that there is not much time to prepare, or warning them that inadequacies will likely show themselves up before the audience. While these are messages we communicate with the best of intentions, they lend a disproportionate weight to the final day. We end up implying, without meaning to do so, that the many days of sweat and practice are mere stepping stones to the ultimate destination of the stage. But is it not true that there is enormous learning to be gained in the 'process'? Don't the children learn to play as a team, sort out differences by themselves, empathise with characters of a play, or discover the joys of dancing in tandem? And when these are experienced day after day for a sustained period, surely the process (or journey) must be recognised and celebrated for its own merit!

To this end we could, as teachers supervising a group of participants, perhaps draw the finish line at a point beyond performance day. We might perhaps dedicate a few classes to contemplative reflection: How did you feel in the hours leading up to the start of the performance? What were the challenges you had to contend with during rehearsal? What did you look forward to most in your daily practice sessions? Why did you want to participate in the first place? What has this experience helped you learn about yourself?

Questions such as these could be pondered over at open forum discussions, reflective writing, or through artistic expression. These exercises, when attended to with seriousness and sincerity, might help move the spotlight away from the act of performing for another and ironically back to oneself. And just as crucially, they hold the power to lend the perspective that the performance is just one step in the process, not the end goal.

Normalizing performances

More often than not performances in school tend to be organized at select

periods in the year—be it a yearly high school play, annual sports day, or classical dance programme. Part of their allure lies in their relative infrequency. After all, it's not often the case that students of any one grade take to the stage more than once or twice a year. This then, understandably, attracts significant attention from multiple stakeholders: parents, former students of the school, and sometimes the families of teachers too; not to mention the existing students and teachers of the school. When there is likely to be such a sharp focus on them, the students involved in these performances can be forgiven for allowing their thoughts to wander and the butterflies in their stomach to flutter. With the knowledge of the number of expectant eyes that will be on them come 'D-Day', it's easy for the participants to—in sporting parlance—play the occasion and not the match.

One way to bring the attention back to oneself and what one is working on could be to dilute the perceived grandeur of these occasions. This could be achieved by reducing scale and increasing frequency. For example, having shorter plays or smaller tournaments happen a handful of times a year (instead of just once) could still meet learning objectives with the added benefit of fostering an environment in which students can retain focus on the concerned art form or sport. With a relative drop in scale of these performances, teachers too should, in theory, not have to devote any more hours to them than what was originally budgeted for. Furthermore, in such an arrangement, parents and other well-wishers could come to watch across a number of days, allowing them to remain more closely involved in school affairs. In the same vein, they could be invited to volunteer in the lead up to the performance, helping students appreciate the value and significance of all that goes on before the lights come on.

Alternatives to clapping and hooting

We have grown accustomed to expressing our approval in the form of applause at the end of any kind of performance. In fact, many might deem it downright rude to not clap when the final whistle has been sounded or the last 'e' strummed. With that in mind, it would be disingenuous to suggest that performers work on untangling themselves from external validation. Any genuine shift in perspective (or movement as Krishnamurti would call it) requires the investment of all parties. It is imperative then for the audience to acknowledge the crucial role it plays in this transformation, and to then play it.

So, can silence take the place of applause? While it might be uncomfortably odd to begin with, it might be worth attempting. In addition to helping move the focus away from the audience, it could help smoothen some of the rough edges one witnesses during assemblies and programmes; we might perhaps recall being amidst passionate and wild hooting at the end of one performance, which is soon followed by a response that is starkly muted at the conclusion of the next. Observing silence instead could take the sting out of such moments and allow the flowering of an environment that is inherently less competitive. Appreciation, should one feel the need to convey it, could instead be expressed face to face by 'going backstage' once the curtains come down.

Enabling osmosis between art and sport

Performing art and sport have much to borrow from each other. Sport, for instance, could do with loosening its impossibly tight grip on winning and losing and lending a little more weight to the joy of simply playing. Could sports audiences for their part come to watch as they would do a dance performance? Could the practice of cheering one team over another be challenged by a quiet wonder of what either team does on the court? In other words, could the sports field also be seen as a museum?

Performing art on the other hand could explore the possibility of garnering a sense of purpose without the attention of admiring eyes. For example, can a play be put up on stage with lights, dress, and props without a single person present to watch it unfold? Could it be done in school, timetabled self-effacingly between the Library and Mathematics classes? Would it be possible for schools to make time for students to sing, dance, or play an instrument without it being 'practice' for a performance? After all, it's something that happens every day with sport; during lunch break and even the few free minutes between classes, students can be seen rushing out to the field to kick a ball or chase each other.

If organized sport and performing art exist in school to enrich and nourish the student, it is crucial to seriously investigate how they are being held: by students, teachers and everyone involved. If one learns through shared observation and first-hand experience that performance day continues to hold all the cards and remains the make or break of one's journey, then it might be time to experiment with some alternative options such as the ones presented above. It is needless to say that our objectives while trying our hand with these things must remain modest; cultural changes alas can only be achieved in the course of time. We might also do well to periodically remind ourselves that this kind of movement is likely to be more felt than observed, and to hence abstain from 'running audits' too frequently. What is decidedly critical though is to find a sense of purpose and meaning in the attempt.

An Immersive Experience in Rural Rajasthan
Unforeseen Learnings

SANJAY MATHUR

A school counsellor asks children of two different classes at Rajghat Besant School to describe in one word their emotions upon returning from a field trip. At the end of the monsoon, Class 9 had gone to Uttarakhand, enjoying the natural beauty, hiking, and physical challenges. They respond with words like 'happy', 'satisfied', and 'amazing.' When it is their turn, a Class 11 boy looks down, then raises his head and answers, 'enriched.' A girl follows and answers 'transformed', another girl says 'alive', and a boy says 'privileged.' Class 11 had gone to learn about life in rural Rajasthan and the work of NGOs.

Over the years, Rajghat Besant School (RBS) and other KFI schools have taken students to the villages of Bhim and Tilonia outside Ajmer, Rajasthan. They are hosted by the School for Democracy and Barefoot College. What is the meaning and impact of such a trip for Class 11 students who are typically 16 years of age? What do they begin to see, and feel, and reflect on, that has the potential to 'transform' or 'enrich' them? In this article I explore this question through the words of a few of the RBS students who went on the Rajasthan excursion from 5–14 October in 2022.

Preparation for the trip

To answer these questions, it is worth knowing what preparation the students received in advance as well as their basic itinerary. RBS Director, Siddhartha Menon, introduced the trip to Class 11 in the form of a talk and slides from a past trip. The following week, class teachers, Ruchi Singh and Sanjay Mathur, asked students to respond in writing to two questions:

1. What would make this trip meaningful to you?
2. What experience of rural life have you had?

In answer to the question, what would make the trip meaningful, one student summarized what she took away from the Director's introductory presentation. She wrote:

> This trip indeed matters to me and I look forward to it because this will be like a pathway to rural India… I would like to interact with various people and knowing their perspectives, understanding how people live in different circumstances… I don't want it to be educational (like bookish) but rather grounded… Some things I would like to discover/unearth during this trip are: rural to urban migration… women empowerment… understanding role of NGOs… why people like Aruna Roy end up working in a village… knowing a bit about labour and their rights.

In contrast, a boy who said he had no prior experience of village life, put it this way:

> I probably would go with the flow; well, I am not interested in the trip. I just want to sleep and eat local delicacies. Well, I just want to go home and listen to music and make music. Hopefully, I'll get some non-veg!

Another boy with 'almost negligible experience of rural life' wrote:

> I don't know. I'm not clear about my expectations from this trip to rural India, probably because I'm not sure what exactly does the trip hope to achieve…The pictures in the presentation didn't exactly show happy students having fun and the presentation did not advertise 'fun' elements of the trip. Sure, the social services and the insightful experiences might be one of the purposes of the trip, but honestly that's not VERY exciting.

Later RBS teacher and trip coordinator, Dipankar Bannerjee, presented the itinerary of the trip and the students viewed a TED Talk by Barefoot College founder, Bunker Roy. Apart from this, the class teachers did not engage the students in any extensive research for the trip. No other videos, talks, or presentations were given. No websites or articles were read. As one student opined, "Let's just learn on site while we are there."

An outline of the trip

For reasons of NGO staff availability, the School for Democracy in Bhim was visited first, unlike in previous years. This may have been better for context, since children had the advantage of hearing from seasoned staff, including Lal Singh regarding the Constitution, Shankarji regarding Mazduri Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), and Nikhil Dey regarding the Mahatma Gandhi

National Right to Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Mr Dey later also talked to the children about 'privilege', a word the students had already begun to use in their conversations after visits to the local government school and a MGNREGA work site. By the time the excursion shifted to Barefoot College in Tilonia, it was already the fourth day of the trip. There, they learned about the array of comprehensive services this community-based organization provides.

Finally, it was time to visit the field. Students and teachers divided into groups of 5–6 and travelled by tractor trolley to one of four different 'Social Work Research Centres' (SWRC) in the rural hinterlands. They brought only a day pack and spent the night in simple accommodations. The students were escorted by SWRC field staff on visits to women's groups, night schools, day schools, a madarsa, health centres, grain distribution centres, loan programs, and a panchayat. They were encouraged to interact with community members, ask questions, and take notes.

These site visits were the most intense and emotionally challenging period of the excursion. Upon returning to Tilonia, the students were asked to respond in writing to:

1. What did I learn?
2. What inspired me?
3. What troubled me?

Learnings from the field

It was observed that the students left on these visits in high spirits, waving from the back of the tractor trolleys. What they saw and learned was sometimes like a gut punch, on the level of raw feeling and emotion, even after the site visits already experienced at the School for Democracy. Starting with the two boys quoted above:

Boy 1

> I learned that how privileged I am, like it's mind-boggling how people die for basic necessities. We all sit in our air-conditioned room and watch the news with our phones, we will always point out everything by just watching some biased news channels, but witnessing it in real life is heart-shattering, but this is how the world works, world is weird place after all and I hope that people whose eyes opened will not close them.

> 'Troubled' huh… it makes me feel confused and questioning regarding the system. It makes me feel dirty to trust this system, makes me feel empty, distrust, hopeless, agitated.

Boy 2

> I learned that this system we're all a part of is flawed. It's so flawed that the flaws have become a part of the system's working. People have accepted the wrong. But they haven't accepted that it's wrong. I learned that just putting in efforts without procuring any significant change is not enough.
>
> The place was infested with poverty, corruption, dishonesty, and lack of education. The children weren't being educated properly. The village was in poverty. The officials were corrupt. The sarpanch-pati (pseudo sarpanch, husband of the actual sarpanch) was dishonest and was wrongly in a position of authority. A lot of children were malnourished, and the schools were understaffed. And the people of the village had accepted this as their reality.
>
> What has troubled me has also inspired me to change what's wrong. It has inspired me to try to correct the flaws. The fact that there are places like Barefoot College and SfD trying to bring a change has inspired me.

A third boy, whose social and economic background was quite dissimilar from more privileged RBS students, since he lives in a village abutting Rajghat, nevertheless had a similar reaction:

> What we are told is that the people from rural area are poor, but after visiting the rural area, I have got to know that they are far more than poor, they don't even have some of the basic needs such as water, electricity, shelter and so on and on.… The fact that they are the poorest of the poor never makes them demotivated. They are always sharing, caring, and helpful to others. They were lacked with food but still they offered us for the meal and chai. Now, they all are inspiration to me and in the future, I seriously want to help them up with all the crises they are facing.

More soberly, a girl with experience of visiting her grandparents' village, where her grandmother also serves on the panchayat, wrote:

> The trip to the field centre was very enriching in many ways. It helped me to feel empathetic towards people from all walks of life truly, and also helped me to look at things from a different perspective. Talking about gender, caste, class discrimination is very easy and convenient to talk about sitting in a room with people who have never really faced these or maybe in very subtle ways, but talking to humans who are always made to realise these things

> mentioned above, is really an experience that's unparalleled…The children studying in the 'Night School' inspired me in a lot of ways, working all day as labourers and cattle herders at such young and innocent age and then studying in the night school every day (apart from Sundays) from 6–9 pm truly shows what studies and learning means to them and choosing to study instead of staying at home in spite of being tired. Something that troubled me was the government senior secondary school, where there were only three teachers in a school from grades 9 to 12, the fact that their parents chose to send them to study but still their study and learning was hampered and it was just a disguised way of corruption again. In spite of this suffering and horrors and the sad and bitter truth of reality that each one of the persons there went through and still goes through every day, they still find ways to be happy and fight for their rights.

Another girl with ample awareness of India's social issues, as a result of travels with her mother across India to develop a group of SC/ST leaders, was still moved by the experience and wrote:

> I learnt that I have everything, and I have done nothing to deserve it. It has been given to me because of the accident of my birth. I learnt that if I feel something needs to be done for someone, I need to do it by myself. I need to put in effort. I need to raise my voice, let the problem hear it. What inspired me was the sight of the village kids studying under a solar lamp at 7 pm while it was pitch dark. How could I have spent all those nights in my room, keeping the light on, the fan on, the air conditioner and what not? I knew I was going to come back to that village to do SOMETHING, anything. Someone here told me that these schools won't make a lot of difference and I disagreed, heavily and completely. I knew that this was going to be a better generation, the one I was looking at. Even if a 13-year-old girl among those kids was married and was probably going to have kids way earlier than she should, yet she would at least know education and she would try hard to have her kid know that education.

On returning to school

On their return to RBS, the day after a 21-hour train ride, a final more comprehensive trip evaluation survey was conducted. Two of the questions asked were as follows:

1. 'Regardless of what I already knew or had experienced about life in rural India, this trip was a real eye-opener.' Please respond at some length and how you agree or disagree.

2. Give the name of one or two staff members from either organisation who inspired you in some way and write why.

It was revealing to find that every single student said they would be interested in doing a one-month internship with either of the NGOs and a significant number also said they would be interested in doing a one-year fellowship. Clearly, the staff they interacted with impressed them. For example, one boy who is in the science stream wrote:

> One of staff members of SfD, Nawaz, had inspired me. He had completed his degree in engineering from Hyderabad and could've easily worked in that field and earned good money. He could've had a satisfactory life. Instead, he chose to work for the people, helping them to get their rights, being a part of an important movement, while earning minimum wages. And he still seemed satisfied with that. This thing, that he chose to do, was inspiring for me.

Pushing against the often-negative tag on 'activists' and 'socialists, another boy wrote:

> Nawaz and Saba inspired me to take risks in life, to help the one in need. They left their well-paying jobs and work in a simple paying job just to help people. They are not activist or socialist but human.

A girl wrote about a caretaker and cook at one of the SWRC field centres run by Barefoot College, illustrating again the wide interaction with people that children experienced on the trip and their sensitivity to others in more humble and unsung roles:

> Someone who really inspired me was the lady, Kalavati devi, with whom we stayed. She had lost her husband long back and had two daughters too, whom she took care of, raised them all alone and on top of that, she also helped develop lot of things in her village singlehandedly and did lot of work there. She was a fast learner and quite intelligent despite the fact that she only did her schooling till grade four.

Whether it really was an eye-opening experience, one girl who wrote in August that she "lives in a semi-rural area" in the hills and thus had "witnessed rural life very closely", nevertheless exclaimed:

> I agree with this statement a lot as reading something in books and seeing or experiencing it in reality is way too different. I literally got goosebumps when I got to know the girl I was paired with at school was married! I also got a

> bit emotional while working and experiencing the work at the MGNREGA site as I tried to keep myself in their place. And the most striking/hitting experience was meeting the old blind lady who had no one to look after her. That was the time when I was left numb for some minutes. I was feeling helpless as I could not do something for her and ended up giving her my scarf. That blind (lady) held both my hands and touched it with her eyes and cried. That experience is unforgettable for me.

Nearly all the students contrasted book learning with experiential learning, as this girl wrote:

> I already knew that discrimination based on caste, gender, religion etc., exists in the world that we live in but actually talking and coming face to face with these things every day on top of being poverty stricken and not having the bare minimums which makes it even worse. This trip was a real eye-opener for me because it helped me see beyond certain areas of life which I had never even given a thought about….

Another girl, who was already intent on social work, found validation for her vocation, and also indicated the influence of the trip on fellow students who seem to be changing their plans:

> Regardless of what I already knew about rural areas and life of most of the people in India, this trip was a real eye-opener, on the basis of it being on the ground. I saw the things I only knew about, that was the difference…. I know people from my class that have completely changed their future plans because now they have seen what real life is. Real life is on the ground. It is struggling for what you deserve and failing. It is not being born in a wealthy family and having what you need and want, being given things in hand. Life is of those students who can't dream to get out of their village, so may choose Army. Life is of those girls who are in school and married, because the law requires them to. This trip has shown me what I have and helped me feel grateful for it. I also now know EXACTLY what to do with my life. I know that feeling bad for the people who are struggling isn't enough and there are so many ways I can help the people I want to help.

Discussion

A trip can only be measured against its own objectives, whether lofty, limited, or unstated. How much really can a one-week trip, and only 24 hours of real interaction in villages, achieve? It turns out, quite a bit. Based on students' writings, all were impacted by the trip in unexpected ways.

While some were impacted more than others, as noted already, every single one of them expressed the desire to volunteer for a one-month internship at either organisation.

What strikes one is the depth of feeling with which students responded to the realities they had only read about such as child marriage, unequal schooling conditions, discrimination, and injustice. Further, they express indignation at what they perceive as dishonesty, such as the sarpanch's husband blithely telling them there is no child marriage, gender inequity, or caste discrimination in his village. Numerous students seemed to put their own problems, such as lack of air conditioning, into a different category now, seeing them as petty compared to the injustice and harsh realities they saw people experience – people they now knew had a name and a face.

While poverty is ubiquitous the world over and something we live with, the many examples of injustice, dishonesty, discrimination, and corruption are less perceptible. As students learned, this can be something so basic as the right to be paid for work done, for example under the MGNREGA schemes. With this appreciation in mind, perhaps their entire perception of those 'protesting' or making a 'disturbance' or a show even of 'kali Diwali as a form of protest, is something that will change now. Taking MGNREGA as only one example, they are certainly more aware that a right may exist on paper, in an act or a law, yet they know people must protest to see that what is on paper—and in the Constitution as a whole—is implemented and rights and responsibilities are made real.

Could this be the awakening of a moral intelligence, a social conscience? To many adults, the moral clarity of children comes off as refreshing and an instructive reminder that we perhaps have made too many compromises with the world around us, and we have become at least partially immune to suffering and injustice that both we and the children know is not acceptable. Whether or not the seeds of an awakened moral intelligence and social conscience will last, remains to be seen.

The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference towards one's neighbour.

—Mother Teresa

Connecting to Self and the World in the Time of COVID

BHAVEEN SAWLANI & SUMITRA M GAUTAMA

Preamble

"How do we understand our connection with our neighbourhood?"

This was the question that prompted the Longitudinal Survey (LS) process[1] that was initiated and conducted by Classes 9 and 11 of Pathashaala in 2014, 2015 and 2019. The effort was not linked directly to any specific subject outcome, or part of the academic programme of any exam requirement. At its core, we initiated the LS because the equity-based lifestyle of the school made the question inevitable. In the stated words of LEs[2] from their presentation at Vasanta Vihar in 2019, they aspired "to understand various aspects of the lived reality of a rural community, to build an experiential understanding of how lives and lifestyles of a village shift and change over time, and the global and regional dynamics that influence this change; to explore through analysis and reflection, the socio-economic, cultural, environmental and livelihood-related impact of governance and development", and perhaps primarily, "to sustain an ongoing relationship with the people of Vallipuram."

We have focused on Vallipuram, as the nearest village to Pathashaala, and one with which the school has many connections, with the help of an NGO, Hand in Hand. These surveys were based on a sample of 196 houses, one in every four in the village.

1 "In a longitudinal study, researchers repeatedly examine the same individuals to detect any changes that might occur over a period of time. Longitudinal studies are a type of correlational research in which researchers observe and collect data on a number of variables without trying to influence those variables." Thomas, L. (8 May, 2020). Longitudinal Study: Definition, Approaches & Examples. Scribbr.

2 LE and EL are terms used at Pathashaala for Learner-Educators and Educator-Learners instead of student and teacher, pointing to the symmetry in the roles as supporters of learning and learners.

When COVID struck, students went back to their homes and began the tortuous process of learning online. One online academic year stretched into the next and the future seemed bleak and isolated and there was no hope of continuing the LS at the time. It was then, in the first term of 2020, that it suddenly struck us that we could connect to ourselves and others in a wholly new way—through the dynamic reflection that 'pre-surveys' could provide. The change that this wrought in both ELs and senior LEs is difficult to describe. The prefix 'pre-' did a lot for the morale as well, for it gave a sense that real-life contact and connection would return. We embarked on what we thought would be one pre-survey; but as the quarantine extended and students came and went from the campus in a sporadic manner, we ended up doing four. The exploration resurrected the spirit of these surveys and built a measure of sanity into a chaotic landscape of life and learning during COVID.

Pre-longitudinal Survey 1: Surveying ourselves

October 2021

In this first pre-survey, the peak period of COVID, LEs turned the spotlight on themselves and their immediate surroundings. Giving each other numbers and codes to mask identities, they asked themselves important questions like the ones that they had asked people in Vallipuram. The survey gave LEs an opportunity to understand their surroundings (their own homes and localities) in the context of the parameters and related issues that they would be exploring in the anticipated Longitudinal Survey in the physical space of Pathashaala. By understanding, calculating, looking closely at their own lifestyles and consumption patterns, they were able to better understand the issues that affected them, and develop their own parameters of analysis. The first step was to look inward. The areas that were investigated were—landscape around me, energy use, water use, and power consumption—and they also conducted a general survey intended to make themselves aware of the lifestyle choices that they were making as individuals.

Siva Kiran, an LE who opted to work with solar and power audit, said in his review:

> My journey with this survey started with my interest in Physics. But as we came further down the tunnel, my findings on the socio-economic aspect of power generation and production were both reality-breaking

and reality-measuring for me. The question, 'Is more better than less?' has made changes in my understanding of the purpose of our existence.

Shreya who had opted to be a part of the power audit group commented:

> Now I'm more aware of my surroundings, like if I see the fan running on in another room I go and switch it off, which I rarely used to do before.

Krishna Prasad in the landscape survey group, said:

> This survey made me realize how life starts and ends with soil.

Pre-longitudinal Survey 2: Rural-urban connect

February 2022

The intention of this survey was to understand how the issues and parameters looked at in the previous survey connected to the rural realities of India. This allowed the LEs to evolve a more comprehensive understanding of how previous surveys were connected. They researched governmental and other frameworks, budgets, schemes, and policies in relation to their concerns, and in the process also attempted to understand the rural and urban relationships and equations. The areas that were focussed on are—renewable energy, housing and finance, water and health and nutrition. As an LE put it:

> We connected our understanding of the reality in our own respective localities with the reality in villages.

Ayush who worked with the housing and finance group said:

> The last pre-longitudinal survey was a much more personal exploration and introspection of my life. This time I was able to connect my findings with the larger reality of government budgets and policy related to rural and urban spending. This has made me realize the impact of policy and good policy making.

Yash who worked with the water group said,

> The major learning for me from this project was the realisation of the disconnect I had from the rural reality of water in India. I learnt how I had taken for granted the water I was receiving and not looking at where it comes from. I learnt the importance of the availability of water in each household in the village.

Pre-longitudinal Survey 3: Solutions

April 2022

In this survey, with the possibility of the COVID menace receding, LEs

decided to look at the possibilities or initiatives that can be taken based on their own interests. As an LE put it:

> In the pre-longitudinal survey 3 we hope to give solutions to areas of interest which have been selected based on the data collected in all the previous longitudinal surveys.

The areas that were focused on, based on their choices, were waste management, rain water harvesting, solar power, menstrual health, and 'agripreneurship'. Rohan said:

> In all these areas we have looked at what can be done in our school and also how it can be implemented in the villages around us.

It is clear to see that by this time, LEs were beginning to think proactively about issues that are both local and global in impact. This is reflected in the themes that they chose to work with, as well. For instance, Mahathi who is part of the agripreneurship group reflects:

> While I think, on the surface, I was aware of the importance of agriculture on any economy, especially the Indian, I was unaware of the potential for it especially when paired with entrepreneurship. I feel like agripreneurship would produce an indestructible superpower, not only for the benefit of the farmers but also for the economy.

Lucky who was working with rainwater harvesting has this to say:

> The process we went through was a difficult one as there are plenty of complex methods to collect rainwater, evolved by millions of organizations, but we had to come up with one for small houses in the village near us and it made me realize that even though it seemed complex and costly, that was not the case. It made me realize that many things that seem complex are just simple if you actually take time and think about them properly.

The third pre-survey was a watershed effort through which many connections were made and tested and allowed 'to flow'. Theerth who also chose to work with rainwater harvesting, reflected:

> Last term during my November exams, I had a glimpse of the impact of heavy rain in Pathashaala. So, I thought why not harvest the rainwater and use it. I was able to take this forward as part of the pre-longitudinal survey. This was initially not part of the survey, so we had to work from scratch. Considering the factors in Vallipuram we were able to come up with models suited for the village. Improvements can be made to the model and this will be taken forward by the coming classes. This is just the first milestone

> in a longer journey. The biggest problem we faced was to come up with a model for Pathashaala. The residential buildings in the *eris* [3] (surrounding the school) block the water, leading to overflow of that water into Pathashaala. I was initially stuck with the mindset that we can use all the water that flows through the school. At the end I learnt that it's best to let the water flow.

The LEs also learnt about themselves in some incremental ways. Working in a totally different area, Khushi of the menstrual health group said:

> I never knew that there was a scheme that provided pads to the girls and women in the rural areas. And I thought I knew everything about PMS, but when I did my research, I found out a lot that women and girls go through before they get their periods. It taught me how much our body changes every month.

Pre-longitudinal Survey 4: Linking to the SDGs

July 2022

The beginning of the first term in the academic year 2022–23 did not allow us to be sanguine about COVID. We were still battling with the need for quarantine and living in a bubble. The LEs proposed another pre-survey. Ashwin Rao, who had initially guided us from Hand in Hand, and then as a parent of Pathashaala, suggested that we link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the United Nations, as a further step to connecting the rural with the urban.

The attempt was to enable the LEs to understand issues in a global context and framework and see and work proactively with the local connection. They were encouraged to form tangibly implementable outcomes that would mitigate or alleviate issues in their chosen areas, and these were linked to an interaction they had with the gram sabha at Vallipuram on 15 August.

The 'local' was interpreted to be the school and the villages surrounding the school (as embedded in the larger context of the nation and the world). The areas that were looked at include: food wastage, metal waste, electronic waste, plastic waste, glass waste, community libraries, games and poverty, rainwater harvesting, secondary education and employment, solar thermal energy, mental health, and farming. The Headman of Vallipuram

3 *Eris* are age-old irrigation and water harvesting systems of south India, seen more in Tamil Nadu. An eri is a water reservoir bounded on three sides by earthen bunds or embankments and the fourth side is open to catchments from where water is collected in the *eri* through gravity." Deka, M. (11 June 2021). In Water Sustainability: A Comprehensive Guide for Effective Water Management (p. 220). Notion Press.

panchayat sparked off the interactions, and much meaningful sharing happened in the gram sabha. The impact of this effort may best be summed up in Khyati's words:

> Through the process of this Pre-longitudinal Survey... I learned how interconnected everything in our world is and more importantly how even small steps can have a global impact.

30 January 2023: The risk of COVID continues. Santha Sheela Nair, a retired IAS officer and a valued resource person of Pathashaala has suggested a symposium around sustainability, and senior LEs have organised one around local action along with four visiting schools. Who knows what new learning possibilities the future will unfold?

Comments on the facilitating process

Facilitating the process of learning for the LEs has meant that one has had to learn on various fronts—planning, interpreting, relationship, organising, initiating interaction.

Planning: research and thinking into what kind of a frame would allow the LEs to connect and proceed with their research and areas of interest in a manner that gives them agency, and which is also coherent and integral to the school's vision of education. Due to its unpredictable part-online nature, the process involved presentations to each other at every stage. As an example, this is a frame for presentation from Pre-Longitudinal Survey 2:

1. Statement of investigative concern: What concerns did you begin with and why?
2. Broad perspectives of analysis: What are the ways of looking at and understanding the issue?
3. Data and Interpretation: Provide evidence for what you are claiming, explaining, reasoning—both quantitative and qualitative.
4. Share findings about the nature of the rural-urban connect in your interface.

Relationship: one has had to speak clearly and compassionately when one saw challenges, and give feedback in a manner that allowed the LE to take initiative and mobilize. It has also meant as a facilitator to learn to hold to a vision for the project with active involvement from LEs.

Organizing: learning to collaborate with colleagues and to hold to a process. It has been rewarding to see the LEs chart their own journeys. The pre-

longitudinal surveys have allowed LEs to think into their location vis-a-vis world problems and take informed and proactive steps in this regard. The success of the surveys according to us would be the fact that these problems have been seen in a light that does not alienate the self or individual at any stage. With the realization that the individual is a part of the larger whole and that the problems of the larger community are the problems of the individual, there has been scope to dream and reinvent with the energy and spirit that comes from individual and collaborative action.

Learning for Educator-Learners

Bhaveen: The pre-longitudinal surveys have taught me that learning to ask a genuine question is the most crucial spark in the learning journey. What begins as a first step is the seed to flower into a deep and rewarding journey of exploration and enquiry. I have realized and seen validated the knowledge that the role of the educator as a facilitator is to attempt to create the right kind of atmosphere where learning can take place. This would include all the work that correct planning and consultation, as well as collaboration, can bring about. While we attempt to do this, there are multiple strands that we hold and see unfolding. Among these is the challenge of relationship—learning to give feedback and ask tough questions, the challenge of working with integrity for a process—the outcome of which is first and foremost (if not entirely) for oneself. There is also the challenge of accepting feedback and listening to others, the knowledge that my best still has the scope of improvement and others' views are important and essential for learning.

Sumitra: Who knew that COVID would offer so much scope to learn? The process of learning does not separate the teacher and the taught. The journey has been one of discovering what is possible as learning—initiating, facilitating, and participating in the scope of the 'radical change' that Krishnamurti indicates. There is a sense of exhilaration and spirit that the young bring just by being who they are, and that fuels an immediacy in evoking the learning possibility for the unpredictable 'now'. Through this process there was vital scope to explore new relationships with the world and with oneself, and to learn from the connections one makes.

On Being A Young Teacher

MANISHA KOPPALA

The day I turned 25, I found myself in a classroom full of ninth graders waiting to meet their new English teacher. As soon as the principal introduced me to them and stepped out, one enthusiastic voice shouted, "*Akka* we thought you would be at least 60. But you're not!" That very moment, I was branded the 'young teacher' in a school full of (mostly) older teachers. In my two years at Rishi Valley School, this peculiar position opened me up to many facets of my students, but more so of my own self.

Being a young teacher brought with it everything one might expect—relatability, approachability, and a quick bond with the students. It didn't take me long to break the ice inside the classroom. The students were curious and chatty, with many questions up their sleeves: "*Akka* is that a permanent tattoo? Are you bisexual? How did you come out to your parents? *Akka*, how did you know when you were first in love?" Their questions were surprising, but I didn't let it show. Then I realized this was perhaps exactly what they were testing me on. To check if I'm 'one of them'; whether I think about, and have opinions on, issues they consider 'cool'. Perhaps I passed.

In the literature classes I was teaching, I tried my best not to replicate the drudgery I experienced in school not very long ago, especially in the way Shakespeare was taught. Inspired by my college professor—a Shakespeare scholar himself—I brought in Bollywood references and Shakespearean trivia to keep them engaged. The end of term projects proved a testament to the fun we managed to have with Shakespeare. The students turned in many creative pieces, including an imaginary interview where the playwright answered questions pertinent to the current times, a WhatsApp group chat dealing with the plot of the play in current-day lingo and emojis, and a job interview with Shakespearean wordplay.

Another Gen-Z idea that worked in the classroom was making students settle down for class on time. The problem was that students took about five to seven minutes after each class to settle down for the next. This would leave me restless

about the time lost and the class would start off on a sour note. So, I made a deal with the students. If they settled down in under a minute, I would play them a song on my speaker. And voila! They not only settled down in time but were also fresh and ready for the lesson.

Outside class, however, I was still finding my footing. Being a teacher in a Krishnamurti school meant that there was no distance between my workspace and where I lived. 'Work-life balance', something all my friends outside talked about, was a concept alien to this setting. Dining hall duties, games and prep supervision, conversations in playgrounds, meant as much as teaching the syllabus did. It took me a while to understand that my job was not limited to the classroom and that the person I was on the whole would have an impact on the students. This was vastly different from my previous job where I could 'switch off' after a day's work. What this also meant was that I needed to be more in touch with myself, understand my needs and moods, reactions, and emotions. Reading Krishnamurti in isolation was one thing, but I was beginning to understand more deeply what he meant about relationships being the mirror through which one knows oneself. There was nowhere I could retreat to after my job. I used to joke to my friends, "I practically sleep in my office". The gap between rehearsing and performing had to be bridged entirely. It was showtime, all of the time! But the upside was that if one is open to it, the entire day can be a quest for self-knowing. When your job doesn't demand a work personality from you, but instead requires all of you, as you are, it pushes you to work on yourself.

I started with this: admitting to not knowing. Teaching felt like it was less about imparting what one knows, and more about the willingness to explore along with the students what one doesn't know. This being my first formal teaching experience, there was a lot I did not know—both subject-wise and otherwise. In class, when someone asked me a spelling I wasn't too sure of, or a question I didn't have an immediate answer to, I would say, "I don't know, but let me find out and get back to you." Curiously, with each 'I don't know', I found myself becoming more comfortable with admitting to not knowing.

Even outside class, I wasn't always sure how to respond to students sharing what they were going through— broken families, self-sabotaging thoughts, relationship troubles, and so on. Then once, a ninth grader came to talk to me. After she was done sharing, I responded, "That sounds tough. I wish I could help you, but I don't know how." To which she calmly responded, "But I'm not looking for help. It's why I came to you. You're not old enough to give me advice, but you're also not young enough, like my friends, to indulge me." She articulated my position better than I could have and reassured me that I'm not here to solve their problems, but instead to hold their hand while they find their own solutions.

Dealing with not knowing was only the tip of the iceberg in my learning journey. As time passed, the 'young teacher' persona faded. Students would not take my instructions as seriously as they did from more senior teachers, assignments would drop in late with no valid reasons, and duties would be left undone. What I'm apprehensive to admit here is that this was amplified by my own insecurities about not being a good enough teacher and seeking their validation to assuage my fears. This meant I wasn't assertive, couldn't draw boundaries, and didn't know how to get them to listen to me without being worried about them disliking me. Again, I began to see what Krishnamurti meant when he said, "The real problem in education is the educator. Even a small group of students becomes the instrument of his personal importance if he uses authority as a means of his own release, if teaching is for him a self-expansive fulfilment."

Was I using teaching for a self-expansive fulfilment? How could someone, especially a young person, assert themselves without falling into the trap of authority? What if I was doing this all wrong, and didn't even have the wisdom or experience to correct myself? Suddenly, being a 'young teacher' began to feel like an oxymoron. When I reached out to a senior teacher with all my concerns, she patiently said to me, "The first step is the very first class. No one tells you this, but in your very first class, you must TEACH. Come prepared with a great lesson plan and just teach your subject. Don't play ice breakers, don't do funky introductions, don't chat or get to know each other. Because in your very first class, you need to build their trust, and establish that you know what you're doing. Friendship can come later. If not, of course they'll take you for a ride!" As contradictory as this may sound, especially in a Krishnamurti setting, I thought back to how true it was for all the teachers I admired. Yes, some of them were warm and encouraging, but more than that, they were demanding of me in the subject. They had garnered my trust before my affection. Sadly, I got this advice much later and my first class had already been used up in icebreakers, and funky introductions.

The more I looked within, the more I found pending inner work to be done. Understanding my own self became imperative to do an honest job at work. Like Krishnamurti said, "Without understanding ourselves, mere occupation leads to frustration, with its inevitable escapes through all kinds of mischievous activities." I remember sharing with a friend that in Rishi Valley, the highs are extremely high, and the lows achingly low. She responded, "That's because that's how high or low they really are, with nowhere to escape. You don't have distractions there, so you have to feel it all fully."

That couldn't be truer. Having nowhere to run was uncomfortable at first, but eventually I learnt to face what is, just

as it is. Being in the valley, I inevitably learnt more than I taught: about the world around me as well as the one within me. I have felt my emotions more deeply, listened to people talk more intently, experienced silence and stillness more calmly, and in doing all of this, lived more fully. Everybody is eager to remind me that the twenties are a defining period of one's life. When they say this, they usually have financial stability and/or a strong career in mind. But for me, the past two years are testimony to the fact that my twenties are defining not just in terms of a career, but in terms of who I become as a person. Who I become is inevitably tied to who I am now. So, while many might regard teaching at a young age as a phase or a stepping stone to something more grand, for me it happened to be the most meaningful decision of my life. There is still a long way to go, many more lessons to be learnt and taught, but I'm grateful to have begun this journey of self-knowing.

Teacher-student relationships as a factor of socialization

Some ruminations from a small school

V ARUN

Schools perhaps play the most significant role in the process of socializing a young person in their formative years. The other key players are obviously the family and society itself. As a teacher I am wondering about the role of socialization in schools. Within school too there are different players—teachers, peers, the culture of the space—all of which play important roles. In this article I am reflecting on my role as a teacher in our small alternative spaces and comparing it with my own experience as a student.

As I grew up, I went to a lot of government and large private schools, where there were more than 40 to 50 students in a classroom. In these sorts of spaces, while some teachers may be accessible to students based on their ability to connect to students and a passion for teaching, across the spectrum there really isn't a very close teacher-student bond in which the teachers have a deep understanding of their students. At least this is not very likely. I must hasten to add here that, in my experience, most schools perhaps have one or two teachers who are accessible to students.

As for me, most of my teachers were not aware of my state of wellbeing or lack of it and did not concern themselves with such matters. I was never once asked how I am feeling or coping with my life. I was actually switched from a small city to a village school in class four, and from English to Tamil medium, in which I struggled. Then I was back to English medium from the village to another large city in class 11, where I struggled again. This was not my only struggle. As my father was in a transferable job, I switched schools ten times. I was almost always the new student, having to find my footing in a new context. I was left to cope or not cope with my struggles. My teachers, who were by and large sincere, focused on finishing the syllabus and if they were warm and friendly, it was in a vague impersonal way.

I contrast this with my experience as a teacher. I have known each of my students well—their relationship with their parents, their areas of confidence, their inadequacies, their many challenges and possibilities. In other words, I have

been quite in touch with their inner world and have felt that it is my responsibility to guide them towards a place of strength and well-being. In fact, as a teacher, I have felt that the sense of well-being is the most significant factor affecting a student's life. Of course, this is true for all ages. When a student is carrying a deep hurt from a broken friendship or relationship, I engage with the student and provide counsel to help the student tide over the pain and gain a perspective on such experiences. Isn't this a part of our mandate in our schools?

I have often wondered about the lack of such engagement in the large private and government schools, where it is not possible to engage in such a manner due to the sheer numbers and lack of time, even if there were such an inclination and the teacher had the mental space for such engagement. Engaging with the inner world of each student is not seen as the mandate of teachers. In such spaces, students must either rely on their own resourcefulness or find support for themselves.

In our schools, where we do engage with each person, with care and the intention of bringing about a sense of well-being, I am trying to look at the possible consequences:

1. Is there a danger of making the students teacher dependent? If yes, how do we avoid creating this dependency?
2. Are we not giving enough room to build their own resourcefulness and the required emotional and psychological muscle to tackle adversity and challenging situations?
3. Most importantly are we subtly and not so subtly creating a mould for students to fit into?

I see that in our small schools, we play a significant personal role in the lives of our students. The fact that we have warm, caring, loving relationships is a significant factor in their lives. But with it also comes a responsibility, right? If we want to see our students as sensitive, responsible, caring, tempered, rational, intelligent beings there is nothing wrong in such a desire and aim, is there? And if we use our resources and the tools that we have acquired to bring about such qualities, surely it is commendable, isn't it? But I am wondering, if in the process of doing so, are we making copies of ourselves and shaping them to be either in our own mould or in some ideal mould (according to us)? When put like that, it sounds scary to me.

I have been accused of being too strong an influence on students or, in less sophisticated terms, brainwashing them through my passion for nature and love for animals. It is true that many of my students have become nature lovers and protectors and have strong relationships with animals. Can this be called 'being a positive influence' or is it 'brainwashing'? Being teachers and adults in our students' lives, there is no doubt that we are an influence on them, and I think it is futile to deny that, and irresponsible too. If we are passionate human beings, acting from that sense of passion, aren't we likely to be strong influences in their lives? Of course, there could be adverse reactions too.

But does being influential foreclose the option of students thinking for themselves? Does the fact that there is a passionate adult whom they look up to, come in the way of engaging with life and arriving at their own conclusions? In this instance does the fact that the teacher, that is me, having a love for the environment come in the way of them understanding the state of the environment and, as a response to that, forming their own course of action? And if doing so, they take to conservation or choose a path of working with and nurturing nature, can one dismiss them as brainwashed people?

Another area which has regularly landed me in conflict is the action of students questioning their parents and house customs, values, practices. This invariably happens when we encourage questioning. When questioning hits close to home in areas like patriarchy, caste systems and practices, it causes a lot of upset responses. I have noticed that as a teacher, I have been subtly messaged not to enter into such conflicting areas.

But then I would ask, is there any escape from being influential? And is influence necessarily a bad thing? Does it interfere with free thinking? I believe that in each person there is a vitality of being, an alive being, with its own inclinations, personality type, possible passions, etc. I wonder though whether this inner being is that easily accessible, even to the child, as there is the whole process of conditioning from early childhood and the process of corruption starts right there, doesn't it? Is there such a thing as a pure response, as a living human to the world outside, without the multifarious influences that one has imbibed through growing up? Other than inviting them to reflect on the conditioning, do we have enough tools to free them from this burden? I personally feel that conversation classes, circle time or culture classes, the different names which we use to describe the collective looking at conditioning, are among the best tools.

Returning to the main theme, I am asking: do we end up moulding our students in certain established ways? If they turn out to be reasonable, rational, intelligent beings, does it make it okay? Is education good moulding? Or, as I would like to think, is education the process of freeing the being within and allowing the being to find space and unfold their wings in this world? If we agree with the latter description, then what would be the process of enabling this to happen? How can we help each child to find the fountain of life within? How do we help them free themselves of the layers of conditioning, while we free ourselves from ours? And also, not add new layers of our own to them. Can we help them come in touch with that alive, vibrant

being inside without shaping them with our own influences and perspectives?

Tentatively, I suggest that part of the answer lies in leaving the student alone. As much as there is a need to engage more with students in large schools, I think there is a case for engaging less with students in our small schools. I feel they must be given the space to fall, to make mistakes, be silly, hurt themselves a bit and learn from all that. I feel they shouldn't have adult's eyes on them all the time, even if they are caring eyes. For young children to develop a sense of independence and a sense of agency for themselves, they need space. When they seek help from us and bring us their problems, while it is tempting to offer solutions or perspectives, I think it is perhaps more valuable to turn them back on their own resourcefulness to engage with the problem. Of course, after giving it a patient and empathetic hearing.

Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind* attributes the success of a mother in bringing up her child to 'loving neglect'. I think there is something to that. As we have moved from large joint families to nuclear families, and from villages to cities, the amount of attention our children receive from adults has increased tremendously. While it may be a result of care and wanting to be there for them, it can have a very stifling effect on them. It seems to make them more dependent and less resilient. Is this correct? Or are there contrary views to this?

How do we create care and nurturance without it being restrictive and prescriptive? I think it is important for teachers, both individually and as a group, to dwell on this. One of my friends had recently written a piece reflecting on his time as a teacher for around a decade. I was deeply moved by his honest and vulnerable sharing. I was struck by two things that he brought up. One was the sense of inadequacy that he had imbibed as an 'average' student, the message that he was 'not good enough' and 'could do better'. What a burden it was on a young mind to aspire for some vague sense of a 'better self', and the feeling that he was not good enough as he was. I found it scary, thinking how debilitating it could be and sadly how very common it is in its occurrence. The second was how he was sort of drummed into shape by the subtle messaging that he received even as a teacher, of what was expected behaviour. That struck a chord with me too.

In our small schools, we tend to very refined in our approach. Not for us the loss of temper, shouting at students, and so on. I can say for myself that, in my 25 years as a teacher, I can count on my fingers the number of times I have lost my temper and shouted. But I have a far more deadly weapon—the withdrawal of affection and warmth. Just a reproachful look is enough. It is both far more effective and far more cruel. I don't even do it consciously and deliberately. But when a child behaves in ways that doesn't meet my approval, my stream of warmth seems to dwindle or dry up. I am trying to be more conscious of this and the awful impact it has on vulnerable children. There is a tremendous responsibility here. I don't think the answer lies in masking or projecting warmth where it doesn't exist, but in a deeper looking at our judgments, expectations, and ways of gaining conformity.

We recently watched the old mini-series of Ingmar Bergman, *Scenes from a Marriage*. It is very insightful and thought provoking. I was struck by the honest lens that he uses to explore the concept of marriage as a social construct. The main female character has a reflective look at her own childhood and that of her partner and the impact of this. I watched the scenes a few times and shared it with my class children. It strongly touched upon the role of adults in conditioning children in a certain mould.

I would like to end by posing a few questions in addition to the ones raised earlier.

1. How can we have a warm and caring relationship with students without fostering dependency?
2. How do we bring about a deep engagement without influencing our students' own inner thought processes?
3. How can we foster the flowering of the inner being while unfolding the same for ourselves?
4. How can we validate and value each person for who they are while at the same time enabling the process of understanding and shedding conditioning?
5. How do we facilitate growth of resilience and emotional muscle from real life experiences without the students going through harmful or hurtful experiences?

My hope in sharing these reflections is the wish that it will lead to further engagement and dialogue.

Book Review

How Mistakes Can Work for You!

SUNANDA ALI

All of us remember in excruciating detail how humiliating it was to make mistakes as students. Mistakes, usually in English and mathematics, were often received with laughter (loud or stifled) or condescension from our peers. We were given the 'correct answers' with the unspoken conviction behind it that we were not smart enough to know better. Our mistakes were never scrutinised for the thinking behind them, and they were certainly never looked at as being necessary steps to the correct answer.

The Reflective Learner, a collection of four teachers' experiences, compiled and edited by Neeraja Raghavan, is a brilliant approach to mistakes. Seeing mistakes as 'missed takes', turning our usual approach to mistakes on its head, this book proves that teachers can look at students' mistakes with a discerning eye, and see them as steps to better understanding.

As teachers we often feel like giving up when we see students 'not improving' or 'repeating the same mistakes', and even when we see that it is imperative to change our method of correcting and giving feedback (and therefore facilitating better learning), we do not see the path to it. The dual pressures of ensuring better grades for students, and the crushing need to finish the syllabus, prevent us from even thinking about anything which may take our time and attention away from these pursuits.

Neeraja Raghavan, (Founder-Director of Thinking Teacher who has compiled and edited this book) in her role as facilitator, uses the Action Research framework to focus on how mistakes can be farmed for their undeniable—but not much recognized—potential. A group of teacher-educators designed the Reflective Learner Programme 'with the intent of utilizing the entry point of mistakes'. Four teachers chose to work on this and documented their work using the 'broad framework of Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect'. These case studies show us how looking at mistakes as opportunities brought new understanding to students as well as teachers.

Two English teachers (Prerna Pradhan and Michael Moses) and two math teachers (M. Gopalakrishnan and Kanchana Suryakumar) devised methods to make use of the potential mistakes can hold. Their overriding objective was to ensure that mistakes are not repeated. Prerna identified three 'struggling' students from grade five who had a range of language difficulties. She made a list of these difficulties before thinking of how to approach them. She never took these students out of class, but through the period of research followed their work with particular attention.

The first thing she did was to establish a 'fear-free environment' and this helped her to create an ambience where all the students became more comfortable about acknowledging their mistakes. She then used various strategies to draw their attention to their mistakes by using display charts and games. When the need arose, she decided on a specific strategy to deal with a student's particular problem. For example, Anita, a student who was interested in reading aloud to students of a lower grade but was not interested in writing was inspired to start writing her own stories when she was told that she could read them aloud later.

Prerna saw an improvement in the three students' self-confidence, ability to spot their mistakes, and willingness to evaluate their work. At the end of three months, Prerna saw an improvement of 50–100 per cent in all the areas which had earlier been problematic for them.

"Fighting the prevalent emphasis on speed and the right answer", Gopalakrishnan (Gopi) decided to focus instead on getting his students to think mathematically. Especially concerned about seven 'struggling' students, Gopi decided to adopt the Reflective Learners Programme to examine how he could help them. His driving passion was to get 'into the minds of his students'. He used a fascinating range of methods—deliberately inserting errors into worksheets, getting students to break down the working of their math problems into four stages, asking them to write down the reason for a particular step, and several others—for students to observe their working and analyse it. Here, too, Gopi had to first create an ambience where students had to stop worrying about making mistakes. At the end of his ten-month effort, Gopi saw an increase in students' interest, confidence, skills and understanding. Most importantly, students realised that understanding was more important than getting the right answer.

Michael was teaching English in grade seven and he adopted the Reflective Learners Programme because he wanted five students to write

correctly. When he realised that students did not know what to look for when they proofread their work, he first gave them a checklist of errors. On observing that this task was too difficult for them, he told them to look for one error at a time. He next wrote down the kind of error it was (in the margin) without saying where exactly it was. This was a game-changer; Michael saw that once motivated to find her error by herself, the student had to focus on her work and reflect on it. The whole process was an eye-opener for the teacher too, as he was forced to be disciplined and focused in his corrections.

Kanchana and her colleague Hemalatha think that, "disproportionate stress on facts and methods" in the math curriculum has "robbed the subject of the beauty and elegance it can have". Making a small beginning at amending this situation, they tried to get their students to obtain a better understanding of the logic in the subject. They designed self-assessment forms where students had to rate their level of understanding, encouraged them to work out sums on the board, gave them incorrect answer keys deliberately, carried out several other strategies to identify habitual errors, and eventually empowered students to analyse their errors so that there was less recurrence. Kanchana's documentation has an exhaustive list of student errors and a methodical analysis of the success of the strategies used.

Each teacher-researcher devised methods which were carefully chosen to fit the subject, the age of the students, and the specific kinds of mistakes made. However, what is common is their passion for their work and their determination to find the best ways to help their students.

This book is a must-read for every teacher who wants a way out of the never-ending vicious cycle of mistakes-corrections-same mistakes. It gives numerous examples of students' work, checklists, tables and graphs that comprehensively document the teacher-researchers (and the students') journeys. Considerable care has been taken so that no question in the reader's mind is left unanswered. We are told how much time the teacher-researchers spent on this programme on a weekly/monthly basis and we can see that, though English and Math are the two subjects talked about here, the approach (with necessary modified methods) is equally valid for other subjects.

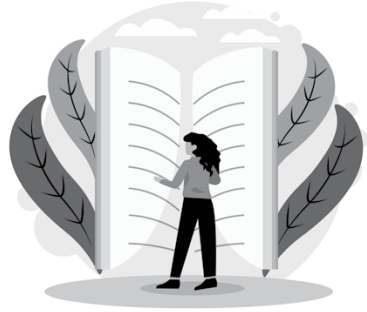
The book mentions that in the West some research has been done on student errors as resources to promote learning (a bibliography of research on this area has been included in the book). However, in India, most people

are unaware of this approach. Mistakes have only been looked at as avoidable and shameful aberrations, or at best as diagnostic tools. In this book, we see how much can be done if teachers learn to look at mistakes with an analytical and discerning eye.

The first crucial step all the teacher-researchers took was to create a fear-free ambience in the classroom. This meant that they too had to be very careful never to be judgemental, condemnatory or condescending. Where mistakes lead to 'low marks' and where success in exams is seen as the only guarantee of a 'bright future', this meant that the teachers had to examine their conditioned response to mistakes. This was not easy, but the effort revealed that many pre-conceptions they had about students and their learning were not true.

Most importantly, they realised that their feedback and corrections must be framed so that students can have a space for reflection which will then lead the way to taking greater responsibility for their work. There was a dramatic change in the teaching-learning paradigm as teachers learned more about what constitutes good teaching from watching how their students think.

This book needs to be in every school library and read by every teacher who wants to do justice to her students, to herself and to her profession. And, lastly, if you are a teacher, do read this book to remember why you chose to be one.



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