



Centre For Learning

Schooling for life

Centre For Learning

Schooling for life

CONTENTS

Intent of CFL	5
Structure of the School	9
Life on a Residential Campus	11
Former Students	14
Curriculum	17
Background of the Group	25

J. Krishnamurti: This is really a vast question, isn't it, not to be answered in a couple of minutes. But perhaps we can put it briefly, and it may be gone into further afterwards.

The problem is not what kind of education the child should have but rather that the educator needs education, the parent needs education...Do we not need a totally different kind of education? – not merely a cultivation of memory, which gives the child a technique, which will help him to get a job, a livelihood, but an education that will make him truly intelligent. Intelligence is the comprehension of the whole process, the total process of life, not knowledge of one fragment of life.

So the problem is really: can we, the grown-up people, help the child to grow in freedom, in complete freedom? This does not mean allowing him to do what he likes, but can we help the child to understand what it is to be free because we understand ourselves what it is to be free?

Our education now is merely a process of conformity, helping the child to conform to a particular pattern of society in which he will get a job, be outwardly respectable, go to church, conform, and struggle until he dies. We do not help him to be free inwardly so that as he grows older, he is able to face all the complexities of life – which means helping him to have the capacity to think, not teaching him what to think. For this, the educator himself must be capable of freeing his own mind from all authority, from all fear, from all nationality, from the various forms of belief and tradition, so that the child understands with your help, with your intelligence – what it is to be free, what it is to question, to enquire and to discover.

But, you see, we do not want such a society; we do not

want a different world. We want the repetition of the old world, only modified, made a little better, a little more polished. We want the child to conform totally, not to think at all, not to be aware, not to be inwardly clear – because if he is so inwardly clear, there is the danger to all established values.

So what is really involved in this question is how to bring education to the educator. How can you and I – because we, the parents, the society, are the educators – how can you and

I help bring about clarity in ourselves so that the child may also be able to think freely, in the sense of having a still mind, a quiet mind, through which new things can be perceived and come into being?

This is really a very fundamental question. Why is it that we are being educated at all? Just for a job? Just to accept Catholicism or Protestantism, or communism or Hinduism? Just to conform to a certain tradition, to fit into a certain job? Or is education something entirely different – not the cultivation of memory, but the process of understanding. Understanding does not come through analysis; understanding comes only when the mind is very quiet, unburdened, no longer seeking success and therefore being thwarted, afraid of failure. Only when the mind is still, only then is there a possibility of understanding, and having intelligence. Such education is the right kind of education, from which obviously other things follow.

But very few of us are interested in all that. If you have a child, you want him to have a job; that is all you are concerned with – what is going to happen to his future. Should the child inherit all the things that you have – the property, the values, the beliefs, the traditions – or must he grow in freedom, so as to discover for himself what is true? That can only happen if you yourself are not inheriting, if you yourself are free to enquire, to find out what is true.



Intent of CFL

Learning at CFL

Centre For Learning is a community of students, teachers and parents interested in inquiring about ourselves and our relationship with the world. From its small beginnings in 1990, CFL has meandered through several locations and campuses. Today we are a semi-residential school on a twenty-acre campus located outside Bangalore City, home to about seventy children, twenty adults and many birds, trees and animals.

CFL began as a response to dissatisfaction with career, lifestyle, relationships and the social contexts in which these happen.

For us, CFL began as a response to dissatisfaction with career, lifestyle, relationships and the social contexts in which these happen. More urgently, we felt a discontent with existing individual and social responses to these challenges. In a world that is obviously in turmoil at all levels—from the personal to the global—it is vital for us as concerned human beings to explore creative responses to the crises surrounding us. Equally importantly, an inward inquiry that seeks to understand ourselves and the nature of personal and social well-being is essential. This exploration is at the heart of our work at Centre For Learning.

Nurturing learning

Today, for most children, education has been reduced to the mechanical study of subjects and training to pass examinations as a route to a career. Our challenge has been to create an environment that nurtures learning, not just in its academic sense, but as a living, vital process of inquiry. We learn about ourselves and our relationships in addition to the skills and knowledge necessary to function in the world.

CFL is what it is because we believe that learning must nurture a capacity for questioning and reflection. It is most effective when it is multidimensional: intellectual, emotional and social. We have to be alive to the child's needs, capabilities and interests. Learning is a creative partnership, as much for the teacher as for the student.

Our challenge has been to create an environment that nurtures learning, not in its limited academic sense, but as a living, vital process of inquiry.



Children can and do learn with a sense of leisure, joy and discipline that is brought about by self examination and awareness rather than fear and punishment.

Our attempt has been to create a space where children can learn free of the pressures of achievement and success and the burden of constant comparison and judgement. Thus, reward and punishment are not used as motivational factors. Nor is there a place for authority and dogma. We see these as detrimental to learning. The relationship between the teacher and student is grounded in a trust that allows for questioning each others' patterns and motives. Over the past twenty years, we have seen that children can and do learn with a sense of leisure, joy and discipline that is brought about by reflection and awareness rather than fear and punishment.

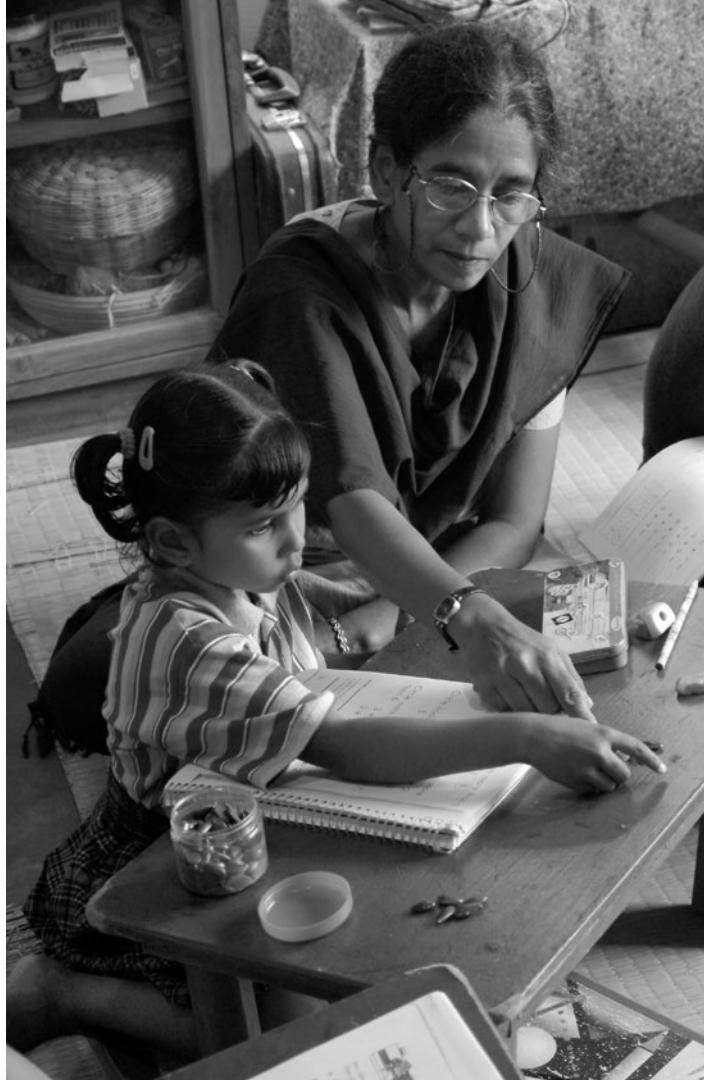
Working here demands that one be interested in an inquiry that is questioning one's life, emotions and patterns.

Adults at CFL

People are central to the survival of a place like CFL. Even when we began, our strength was not in infrastructure or financial backing but in the commitment of a group of people. This continues to be the case today.

Over the years, there has been a steady flow of adults interested in joining CFL. But working here demands that one be interested in an inquiry that is questioning one's life, emotions and patterns. The teacher has to enjoy working with children and should be capable of multi-tasking. CFL can be sustained only if people are willing to extend themselves, looking at the needs of the community as a whole. Our challenge over the years will lie in keeping the fundamental questions fresh in a group whose composition is bound to change over time.

We have often been asked whether our model of education is replicable. In theory, there is no reason why not. However, it requires the momentum of a small group of people who see the importance of a different kind of education in today's global context, and are willing to come together in a cooperative way without the expectation of material rewards and the status they provide.





Parents' role and the admissions process

For a school like CFL, a healthy and open relationship between the teachers and parents is crucial; the child benefits most when this relationship is strong. So it has always been important to us to communicate clearly to prospective parents what our intentions are, and what CFL is all about. People variously believe that we are a non-formal school with plenty of “extracurricular” activities; or a school where children will not be punished and given too much homework; or a school where a certain philosophy is “inculcated” and values “taught”; or a school with a great teacher-student ratio! Perhaps, like all groups, we just don’t like to be type-cast, but we do believe that our fundamental concern is something deeper: to discover what it means to live intelligently and sensitively, by being awake to the patterns of conditioning in behaviour. This concern stems from our own daily interactions, rather than being an abstract philosophical idea.

When prospective parents visit, the teachers describe the intent and functioning of CFL at length, and the parents raise their questions and concerns in an open and frank atmosphere. What we look for is, quite simply, an openness and willingness to work with us in the care of their children. It is important to us that the parents are “discontented” with conventional schooling and are willing, in a critical way, to set off on a new journey of exploration. Children are not given any entrance tests. Fees are never a criterion for admission.

Once a student joins CFL, the parents are encouraged to play a large role, not only in the education of their own child, but also in a wider dialogue on questions of educational and personal significance. The school also welcomes voluntary work in the kitchen (which receives a great deal of parental support), the library and pastoral care. CFL’s parents represent a mixed bag of professions and interests: academics, NGO workers, artists, government employees and self-employed individuals. This diverse parent body has come together to create, along with us, an extended vibrant community.

Once a student joins CFL, the parents are encouraged to play a large role, not only in the education of their own child, but also in a wider dialogue on questions of educational and personal significance.

It is important to us that the parents are “discontented” with conventional schooling and are willing, in a critical way, to set off on a new journey of exploration.



Structure of the School

Organisation

Centre For Learning is a charitable society registered under applicable laws in India.

As a group of adults, we function with a radical organisational structure. We are a teacher-run school. Support staff has been kept to the minimum. Teachers have a variety of responsibilities ranging from the academic to the administrative. We work cooperatively and without administrative hierarchy. Major decisions related to the work of the group are arrived at through discussion and dialogue. Our salaries are reviewed by all of us together and reflect the school's financial ethos. Working closely together in such an environment has been both challenging and rewarding.

As a group of adults, we function with a radical organisational structure. We are a teacher-run school.

We have consciously created a fee structure that is responsive to parents' financial capacity.

Economics of a small school

A central concern of the school is to be affordable to all parents seriously exploring alternative education. We have consciously created a fee structure that is responsive to parents' financial capacity. As a result, income from the fees meets only a proportion of the running costs and none of the capital costs. All of this leads to financial challenges for the school.

Costs are carefully and responsibly monitored and salaries are modest. This calls for commitment and openness from staff. An endowment fund, built up over twenty years, helps meet the annual shortfall in expenses. We have the support of a group of generous donors from all over the world who have helped create simple and cost-effective infrastructure on campus.



Kitchen

The kitchen at CFL strongly reflects the feel of the community. It is an attempt to involve the students, parents and staff in menu planning, vegetable chopping, cooking the meal and cleaning up. A great amount of care goes into cooking wholesome, simple vegetarian food taking into consideration quality, variety, nutrition, taste and quantity. Several students show enthusiasm for cooking and often take on the preparation of dishes and meals.

Facilities

We have managed to create simple and cost-effective infrastructure on the campus. The buildings are aesthetically designed and easy to maintain. Local materials have been used wherever possible.

The library at CFL takes pride of place and is the hub of a lot of the activity on campus. Apart from laboratories for the sciences, we also have a mathematics lab. Our mathematics curriculum includes experiments and investigations in an attempt to help students get a concrete feel for mathematical concepts. We have art and pottery rooms, and an open hall where our morning assembly, dance and theatre activities take place. Children enjoy basic sports facilities which allow them to play team sports and get physically fit. Students and teachers live together in hostels, a little like extended families.





Life on a Residential Campus

Our habitat

Varadenahalli is a small village forty kilometers to the west of Bangalore, not very far from Magadi, the nearest town. Our campus is located on a twenty-acre piece of land near the village. Covered by grassland and deciduous forest scrub, the land slopes down sharply to the north and the high rock at the southern end offers a dramatic view of the whole landscape around. From the rocks on the northern fringe of the CFL campus, Savandurga, the “elephant hill” dominates the view. We have grown fond of this enormous hill that towers over the surrounding landscape. All of us have been to the top, and have stories to tell about the breathtaking view and the tearing winds.

This part of Karnataka receives about 70 cm of rain in a year. The landscape around the campus is dry for most of the year, and the farmers grow a single rain-fed crop of grain (ragi is the staple) and pulses. Thippagondanahalli is a large reservoir visible from the campus that supplies water to the city. There are forests around Savandurga and many species of wildlife.

The land at Varadenahalli has been shaped both by water and its lack. The condition of the soil in the area is typical of that in many parts of Karnataka - semi-arid land, where the soil has been degraded over years due to lack of organic matter and poor management techniques. We have done quite a lot of work in increasing soil fertility, preventing erosion and harvesting rain water. Much more remains to be done. As we have protected the land from grazing, tree cutting and fires, the campus has become an oasis of increasingly dense tree cover and thick grassland. A considerable portion of land has been put aside as a “sanctuary”, for flora and fauna indigenous to this area. The sanctuary provides precious habitats for a wide variety of creatures, many of which are quite rare or unique to these surroundings. The school has several fields that can be used for the cultivation of a wide variety of grains and vegetables and fruit trees. Children of all ages have been involved with this work.

Our time on campus has been one of excitement and joy – putting down roots, exploring the hills and woods around and making contact with the neighbours.



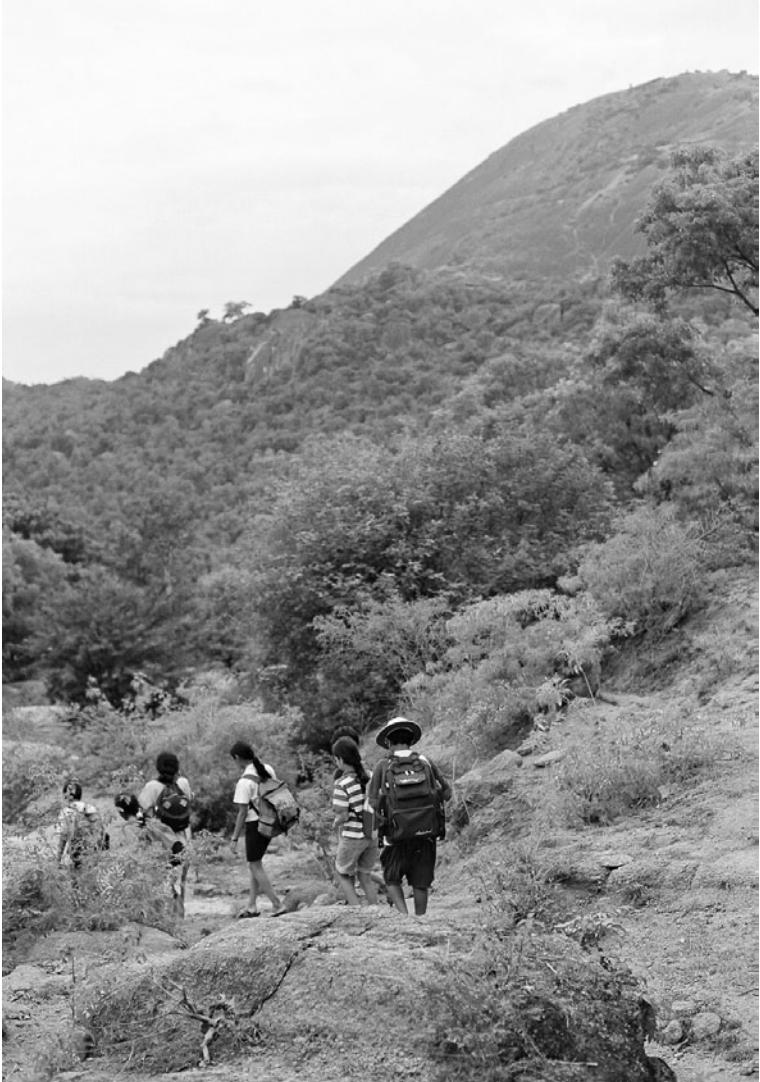
Our daily life

We are a semi-residential campus. Our day begins early, by 7 am, with a session of yoga, exercise or land work. The kitchen comes to life even earlier, with staff and students working to get breakfast ready by 8 am. During “community work” (after breakfast) the buildings are cleaned, garbage is taken out, the plants watered, and vegetables are chopped for lunch. Everyone, young and old, is part of this process.

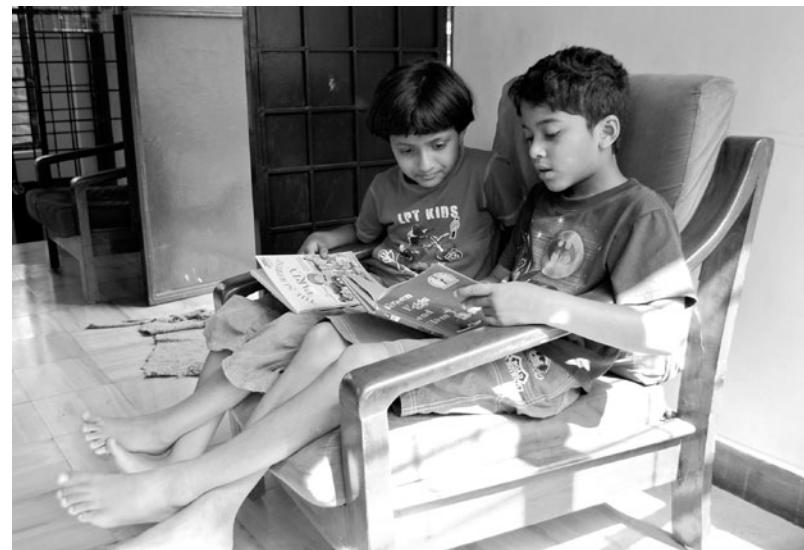
The assembly that follows is the time for singing, presentations and listening. It is the time when the entire community comes together in these activities and in sitting quietly for a few minutes. Classes begin after assembly. The kitchen, meanwhile, continues to hum with activity, with teachers, support staff and parent volunteers working to get lunch ready.

The afternoon brings on a mix of academics or can be a time of relaxed activity with students engaged in craft, pottery, carpentry, or even a quiet snooze! Late afternoons are a time for games, exercise and walks. Around sunset, we have a period of quiet time spent outdoors, being aware of ourselves and our surroundings. Dinner is followed by a quiet period of study, and then we retire to bed.





Our time on campus has been one of excitement and joy - settling down in a new environment, exploring the hills and woods around and making contact with the neighbours



Former students: profiles



Deviah Aiamma **Class of 1998**

I am currently a programme officer with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an inter-governmental and civil society organisation that finds pragmatic solutions to global conservation and development challenges. I work on advising bioenergy policy and project developments to include appropriate measures that protect biodiversity, value ecosystem services, and improve access to sustainable energy equitably. Prior to this, I worked as a policy analyst for the Government of Canada (Department of Natural Resources) on climate change, renewable energy and sustainable forestry policy development. I have an inter-disciplinary Masters degree in Environmental Studies, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Biology, both from Queen's University in Canada. I attended CFL while growing up in Bangalore, from 1993 to 1998.

CFL was much more than an educational experience. Its balanced approach to academic and extra-curricular pursuits enabled me to identify my environmental interests early on. For example, CFL's "School in the Forest" program (in partnership with the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary, Wynad) created a lasting awareness of conservation and sustainable living. CFL provided encouragement and opportunities for me to explore these interests. I was also exposed to a lively exploration of music, dance, theatre and fine arts. I still miss the thrill of performing on stage! In addition to a high standard of academic training, CFL also provided forums for meaningful introspection through regular dialogues between teachers and students. Conversations that inspired me to better understand my thoughts, emotions and actions – this learning continues.

My CFL experience has had a profound influence on me, both educational and personally enriching.



Shabari Rao **Class of 1999**

Many people ask me what an education at CFL has meant for me. The short answer is – it defines who I am, more than any other single thing.

The longer answer is....

I studied at CFL for 9 years (1990 – 1999) and it took the next ten years to process the education I got there! I was one of the first students at CFL (the third to be precise!) and my relationship with the place and people is very special and important to me. Many of my dearest friends are from there.

An education at CFL is a very intense experience – to put it mildly! It took me ten years of being out and about doing many things, meeting different people and living in many places to put this education into context and understand just how much it shapes my life everyday. The choices I make in terms of work, personal life, money and a lot more is informed by an approach to life that was introduced at CFL.

After school I went on to study dance – an undergraduate degree in Choreography and a professional diploma in contemporary dance studies. I worked with a performing company for 5 years and then decided to focus on dance and education. As part of my work I teach in schools and community settings, work with teachers and teacher educators, get dancers to use pedagogical understanding in their teaching, and write curricula for the performing arts in schools. My work in education is also greatly informed by my experiences at CFL. I went back to teach at CFL for two years (2008 – 2010) which was fantastic both personally and professionally! Personally I got to see the school from a totally different perspective, and this made my appreciation and respect for the education there far deeper. Professionally, being at CFL as a teacher helped me to clarify and articulate my approach to arts education.

Now I'm off again; plans to pursue an MA in arts education will take me far away from CFL, but the learning that started there keeps me interested and excited about life!



Sandilya Theuerkauf

Class of 1996

CFL has been part of more than half my life. A lot of the people I relate to are in some way connected to the school. I came to CFL in 1994 when I was 16. I studied for the tenth and later chose Biology and Art for my A levels, and did both exams with a lot of difficulty, especially for my teachers. I was not academically oriented but I had strong interests. This is why I feel that CFL was the right kind of school for me, because I was encouraged to find out what I wanted to do with my life. I was interested in nature and in CFL I was helped to direct that interest. Another important aspect of the school which affected me very much was the feeling of community, that we were a group of people doing something together. That connectedness has stayed and I feel responsible for the school even now.

The move to the new campus was an important part of my learning at that time as I was part of the survey of the new land. During the survey we looked at everything on the campus: trees, plants, birds, rocks, soil. We made a contour map of the land and another to suggest where the buildings could come. The idea of doing something with the land became exciting to me. These are questions I have engaged with over the years. I have been helping CFL to manage the land, and have also been working with the children to try and make them more connected to their land. I took part in many nature study programs, and have planted lots of fruit and forest trees and grown crops on the campus. A large part of the land has been left wild and we have taken steps to improve it so that it can support more of the local biodiversity.

I feel very affected by the way the world is going these days, globalization, climate change, environmental degradation etc. What can I do to have a more positive impact? What kind of a life can I lead, knowing all the problems that exist, and can I somehow make choices and decisions keeping these in mind?

These days I do lead a simple life, with the good fortune of not having the pressure to pursue a 'career' or earn a lot of money. I live in a rural area, farming and looking after a piece of land. I also work with school children doing nature programs. I not only engage with the land in a practical and functional level, I also enjoy being creative with stone, wood and soil as another way of relating to the earth.



Lakshmi Viswanatha

Class of 2002

I passed out of CFL in 2002 and went on to graduate in 2005 in English Literature, Communicative English, and Psychology. I then completed a Masters in Social Work from TISS, Mumbai, in 2007. Since then I have been working in the development sector and have experience in counseling, project management and documentation.

My first job at Positive People's Company included counseling clients from various corporate companies, conducting trainings and writing for the monthly e-bulletin. I then moved on to Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, which works primarily in the field of HIV/AIDS. In the past two years, I have been responsible for managing different projects on the field, developing manuals and other documents, organizing workshops, writing papers and attending national and international conferences to present them.

My parents admitted me to CFL when I was eight years old. Coming from a conventional school with uniforms, textbooks and strict teachers, this set-up was entirely novel. While academics was an integral part of this education, it was not the only point of focus. In fact, "quiet time" and being by oneself, activities that seemed so mundane, were given much importance. Further, several co-curricular activities such as pottery and music were offered and there was freedom to do just what we wanted.

Given this context and the fact that I was then a hyper-active and restless child, CFL was liberating from the confinement of classrooms and the strict decorum that was required to be followed. I therefore, never understood the need or significance of "quiet time" and I hated the classes that were slotted for this activity. But gradually, as years went by, I began to realize that it had become an integral component of my life, and on days when it was absent, it made me feel incomplete. I also saw that responsibility and freedom were two sides of the same coin. In addition, I began to appreciate the holistic perspective with which we were being educated in this school.

While it is hard to highlight the difference(s) that CFL has made in my life, I can safely say this school has helped me discover a way of living, which I cherish. There is a sense of security, which enables me to question and respond to life and its various challenges.



Minti Jain

Class of 1999

I completed my Masters in Environmental Conservation Management, after which I assisted a few projects at Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment, Bangalore. I later joined Down to Earth Magazine, a wing of Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. I worked there as senior reporter, which entailed traveling to different states in India and reporting on urban issues. At present I'm working for Saahas, where we do waste management across Bangalore.

During my school years, I was described as a very quiet and shy person. I did however, have a part within that was bursting to express itself, but something held me back. Perhaps it was fear of being anything less than perfect. But I also had the determination to overcome all my fears, however big or small. The atmosphere at CFL certainly assisted me to grow on this path.

At CFL I was encouraged to be myself and discover what that is rather than 'become' something. There was a lot of space and opportunity for this to happen. Apart from many extracurricular activities, we were exposed to a range of work environments and societal situations that broadened our horizons. Even the academics were taught in a way that encouraged a lot of self-learning and minimized peer comparison or pressure from teachers to produce any pre-determined results. At the same time one's limits were pushed equally in every direction, whether it was mathematics, sports, helping with the daily chores of sweeping and mopping or regarding each one's behavior toward the other... nothing was neglected. We had scheduled class time when we were left to do no activity but just sit and observe what was happening around and inside. And there were sessions when we had to share our observations, feelings, thoughts, problems; this really helped to look closely within and at one's behavioral tendencies.

School meant a space where learning took place for both students and teachers. There was no punishment for any 'wrong' doing. I found it very clever of the teachers to make the students themselves feel responsible for what they did. This was much more effective in producing corrective action and in later years to be able to make one's own decisions with some clarity. This also gives very little space for blaming anyone else for one's action.



Nikhil Fernandes

Class of 2003

After I left CFL, I attended Colgate University, a liberal arts college in New York state. I received a BA in Physics, with a minor in Applied Mathematics, and graduated in 2008. While at Colgate, I did research on laser optics and superconductor physics, and I volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, an organization that builds houses for low-income families and helps rebuild after natural disasters. After Colgate, I joined Cornell University for a PhD in Applied Physics, and I study novel nanocomposite materials with a view towards alternative (solar and geothermal) energy applications, a field I hope to eventually work in.

CFL has been such a large part of my life, both at home and at school, that it's hard to separate its impact on my life from everything else. Academically, especially considering what I do now, I might as well have been home-schooled! However, I do think that CFL has given me the ability to introspect, the gift of emotional detachment, and the curse of having to say "Nothing, really" when asked what I'm thinking about when I become quiet.

Looking back with a few years of distance, perhaps the single most important thing I've taken away from CFL is not a lesson I learned at school, but the example set by the people who gave up their time, and in many cases otherwise lucrative careers, to fill a need they saw. Of all the things about CFL that may have changed the direction of my life, that may well prove to be the most significant.

Curriculum

The academic programme

We would like our students to experience the satisfaction and confidence that comes from understanding academics. We seek to emphasise the thinking processes that underlie the various disciplines: thinking like a historian or a mathematician for example. With this understanding, we believe, comes an appreciation of the beauty of all these varied and interconnected aspects of human thought and insight.

For this to happen, students have to gain a skill and knowledge base in the core areas of language, mathematics, social studies and science. Our curriculum includes rigorous engagement with independent thought and work, as well as routine drill and practice. We equip students to learn from a variety of sources: texts, lectures, discussions, experiments and observations. With all of this in mind, we have drawn up core curricula for the ages 6 to 14 years. The curricula give the teachers a base and guideline on which to develop classes creatively. At CFL, teachers have the flexibility and autonomy to teach in their own style, while keeping learning outcomes firmly in mind.

In the 10th and 12th standards, we present the students for recognised school-leaving certificate examinations. We have selected a certification that best reflects our own approach to the curriculum: the CIE IGCSE certificate at the secondary school level and the CIE GCE 'A' level at the senior secondary level.

The youngest students learn languages and mathematics, do projects and hand work, go for long walks and do gardening. In the middle school they continue with

After twelve years of schooling, our students are responsible learners. They are not intimidated by what they do not understand, and are able to look at life and livelihood in terms of opportunities for learning.



these activities, but projects are now also subject based and there is a greater demand for taking responsibility for work. The secondary years are focused on honing academic skills and developing the ability for abstract, conceptual reasoning. In the senior school, students choose the fields that they enjoy and need for further study, and they seriously explore their livelihood options.

In conventional education, individual ambition and competition are often the tools that motivate young people. Our approach to academic learning is not designed along these lines; rather, we appeal to an innate sense of curiosity to know, understand and enjoy that we believe every child has. We have found that competence and confidence are attainable without the insecurity and divisiveness that ambition invites. After twelve years of schooling, we feel our students are responsible learners. They are not intimidated by what they do not know, and are able to look at life and livelihood in terms of opportunities for learning.



Annual mela

Every year, the entire school is involved in the close study of a particular theme in a multitude of contexts. This whole colourful experience is presented as a mela. The idea is to allow each student to explore a subject hands-on, using theatre or art, including an element of research and detailed study. This extended engagement gives a feel of the richness of the topic at hand. Our melas have been on mathematics, toys, astronomy, land, magic, storytelling and the Mahabharata.

Activities

Throughout their schooling at CFL, the students engage in hands-on skills such as art, craft, sewing, pottery, gardening, carpentry, electronics and photography, and also body and movement related skills such as dance, drama and music. Our approach is not to guarantee exposure to an exhaustive list of all these activities to form a “well-rounded personality”. Various sensibilities are awakened in a growing child through various modes, and we aim to enable this. It is always a juggling act, given the constraints of a school day and the particular skills available within the teacher body. In addition to teachers who share a passion for these activities with the students, we also enlist the help of professionals, former students and parent volunteers.



Involvement in the land

We would like our children to develop a deep intimacy with their immediate living neighborhood. We hope that this will help them develop an affectionate relationship with all living creatures. It is only such a relationship which will help us understand our place in the web of life. There is also an urgency about the need for children to connect to beings and objects not created by thought. Most urban children seem to be living in a virtual reality and today educators are talking about a 'Nature Deficit Syndrome' that affects our well being adversely.

In order to facilitate such an intimacy students spend a lot of time observing nature, going for long walks, keeping a nature journal and collecting data about the biodiversity on campus. The idea is to have a very keen and accurate understanding of the habitat

we live in. The work that we have done so far has yielded some very exciting and encouraging results. While learning about the various habitats on campus, children have been party to some very thrilling discoveries. These include rare species of plants, butterflies and lizards. We are learning more and more about how even a small strip of land such as ours is home to many wild creatures. This first-hand experiencing of wilderness appeals to children tremendously. Don't be surprised if on a visit to our campus you see a whole herd of children dropping whatever they are doing to go look at a beautiful bird or an awesome insect or a riveting snake!

The second strand to our curriculum involves taking care of and connecting with the land that houses our campus. We see this as part of our responsibility as stew-

ards of the earth. Students have undertaken projects which involve mapping the campus, understand issues of water flow and erosion, growing fruits and vegetables, planting trees and caring for them, creating ornamental gardens, maintaining the fence and removing weeds and invasive species. In the process we have encountered challenges that are faced by many environmentalists – the impact of invasive species such as *Lantana* and *Eupatorium* and how to manage them. These in turn have led us into becoming aware of many issues that confront us as humans – the interaction of people and their needs on the land, the questions of sustainability, the complexity and the interconnectedness of many environmental issues and finally our need to consume and our impact on the environment.





Sports

Too often, schools relegate and restrict sports to after-school hours and for those who are especially good at it. At CFL, games and sports are totally participative and celebratory. By that we mean that all students play games, irrespective of their prowess at it. The attempt is to convey the sheer joy of physical movement, energy, exuberance and special skills inherent in each game.

We lay a great deal of emphasis on physical fitness and strength. In a day, almost two and a half hours are given over to yoga, stretching, exercises and games. The students enjoy this space and guard it zealously.

Over the years, students and teachers have played cricket, basketball, throwball, handball, and table-tennis. After moving to the present campus, football, volleyball and table-tennis are the regular games played. We have always played these games with help from teachers or former students who were skilled in the game. Occasionally, we have had trained coaches come in to impart a special fitness programme. An ongoing feature of our games programme is the willingness and enthusiasm with which more experienced students take on skill building for the newer ones.

At CFL, games and sports are totally participative and celebratory.

Excursions

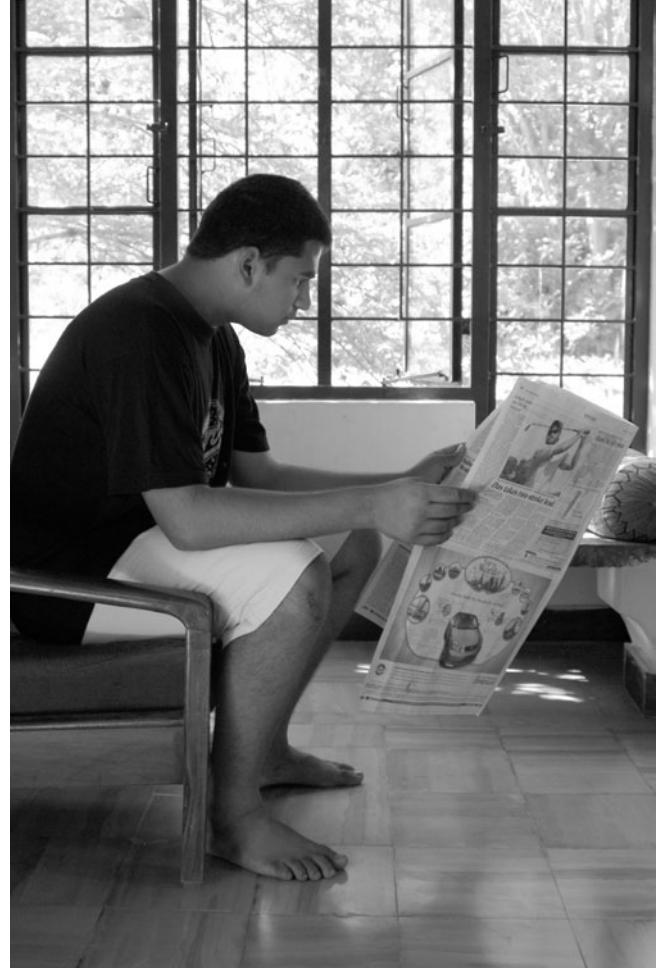
Every year, the students go on exciting trips to various parts of India in small groups. The younger ones visit nearby places for a few days, but older students travel quite far for two to three weeks. The aim of these trips is threefold – to challenge ourselves physically (trekking, climbing, swimming), to immerse ourselves in the cultural and historical sites that India has such a wealth of, and to expose ourselves to lives and lifestyles outside our own milieu. An inevitable aspect of the trips is the demand placed on the children to adjust to life away from home, without the usual comforts, and we find consistently that children enjoy the simplest of pleasures on these trips. Entertainment takes on a new meaning. In the middle to senior school groups, students take on some of the responsibilities to make sure the trip proceeds smoothly.

Over the years we have visited almost every state in India. The children have swum in lakes, rivers and the sea, climbed forested *ghats* and snow-peaked mountains, wandered through ancient temples and palaces, slept in village and tribal homes, under the stars, on the beach, in the forest, traveled by bus, boat and train, and have come to feel at home in every corner of this vast country.



The rainforest

For many years now, CFL has been working with a botanical sanctuary, run by friends, on the edge of the rainforest in Wayanad, Kerala. As part of an ongoing experiment on nature and education, groups of students and teachers from CFL spend some weeks at the Sanctuary every year. Nature study at the Sanctuary attempts to develop children's capacities for observation, in a direct manner involving their senses. They learn to ask questions based completely on their own observations, and experience first hand learning, with no book or expert knowledge involved. All this helps to bring about a sense of intimacy with nature. The students have taken up impressive studies on birds, ants and other insects, ferns, endangered plants and habitats, river life and so on.



The open library

CFL has an open library both in concept and reality. There is free and open access to all material and resources, at all times of day and night, throughout the year. The challenge for the CFL librarian is not one of policing and monitoring, but to see and hold the library and its users as a vibrant functioning whole. We can only do this when the community of users feels a sense of ownership and accountability. For example, on an afternoon when there is a sudden thunderstorm, a couple of students dash to the library to shut windows and move books out of reach of the rain. At night, the library is locked by individual senior students.

The main library is located in a beautiful building whose ambience welcomes and invites all users and visitors. The collection reflects the commitment to quality and excellence. Classics, both traditional and contemporary, can be found on the shelves. Staff and students are actively involved in the selection process.

There is free and open access to all material and resources, at all times of day and night, throughout the year.

Every student group has a weekly library period for browsing, borrowing, returning and for various activities to enhance reading and awareness of the library. Helping the library in various ways is an inherent culture of the place. Books in need of repair are restored imaginatively and lovingly by students. Students also do projects to facilitate use of the library by creating bibliographies, making indexes and labels for shelves and making posters and bookmarks. One student group has put together a short video on the library and a brief computer guide for newcomers.

An innovative in-house computer programme (created by an old student) ensures that all users can borrow, return, search for, reserve, and conduct other library operations with ease. The facility of borrowing has been extended to former students, parents and guests. There is a plan to enter into reciprocal borrowing with a few other school and institutional libraries soon.

Dialogue

Is there a way to live in this increasingly complicated world with a sense of well-being and balance? Not merely a well-being that stems from complacency and compromise but one that is unshaken by the swirling currents of sorrow, fear, hurt, anger, jealousy and so on. It is clear that there can be no blueprint for such a state however devoutly we may wish for it. We can only begin from where we are with all our insecurities, anxieties, hurts and preoccupations!

At CFL, this exploration is of fundamental importance and we have attempted to provide different spaces for this to happen. One such space is a weekly dialogue and discussion time, when each group of students meets along with its co-ordinator and one or two more teachers. The dialogue class is where the adult and the student are in the same boat on an uncharted sea. Issues and questions pertaining to life and living are raised and explored, with participation from everyone in some form or the other. One may begin with questions about the state of the world and track it down to one's own state of mind. Or conversely, one may begin with the movements of anger, desire, happiness and sorrow arising in each one of us in response to different triggers, and discover how this is reflected in groups, societies and nations.

In the junior school, such spaces are used by the children to express their feelings and thoughts. The adults help to broaden the perspective. By middle school, the children have begun to be more reticent and even secretive. Here the teachers' role is to draw out their responses and provide the atmosphere of trust where no topics or questions are barred.

By senior school, students seem to be ready to grapple with more abstract inquiry and show a remarkable ability to be at home in the world. They recognize the threads which connect these two and no longer look at society as something "out there."

The dialogue class has an openness and flexibility that takes in all approaches.



One of the recurring questions is to do with action. What is the right action in response to all that we perceive and experience? Clearly the adult cannot provide answers. He or she can raise the questions and point out that seeking too quick an answer can come in the way of truly understanding the question.

The dialogue class has an openness and flexibility that takes in all approaches. The only commitment is to an uncompromising and energetic inquiry into the nature of our lives.

Issues and questions pertaining to life and living are raised and explored, with participation from everyone in some form or the other.



The benefit of this interaction for CFL students and teachers is immeasurable.

Varadenahalli interaction

The village of Varadenahalli has about 80 children of school-going age. The first to fifth standard children attend a government primary school just outside CFL, while older children walk to the nearest secondary school. Since our moving to Varadenahalli, CFL has engaged with the village children in several different ways. We began with evening sessions when they would come to play games, do art and craft work, learn throwball, do puzzles, listen to stories and borrow books. These sessions were run by two teachers and two older students. Our science teacher has done simple experiments with the younger and older children, both on our campus and in their school. Over a year, one class from CFL worked with the fourth and fifth standard children on several projects—a bilingual play, sketching and painting, pottery and other craftwork.

Detailed projects have been done on various aspects of village life in Varadenahalli, by younger students (on the life stories of several residents) and seniors (a survey of literacy, occupation, education, water, sanitation and housing). Currently we are working on a series of simple lessons on “survival mathematics” for 8 to 10 year olds that can be implemented by senior students.

The benefit of this interaction for CFL students and teachers is immeasurable. It is a conscious part of our education to sensitize students to the realities of the world around them, while at the same time helping them to engage constructively, albeit in small ways, in social and environmental work.



Staff



Ashok Biradar obtained a BCom from Bangalore University. He currently coordinates administrations and the work of managing the campus.



Krishna H has a Masters in psychology. After three years of working in a Therapeutic Community, he took to teaching psychology. He is interested in exploring the process of learning with children. Other areas of interest include culture studies, theatre, music and wood-carving.



Diba Siddiqi has an undergraduate degree in Anthropology (Bryn Mawr) and a Masters in Public Health (Johns Hopkins). She worked for five years with the Urmul Trust, a development organisation in rural Rajasthan. She is a keen photographer.



Lalita Manjunath took a degree in education after a BCom. She is interested in craft, pottery and music and has developed pottery as a major activity in CFL.



Kamala Mukunda completed her PhD in educational psychology from Syracuse University, has taught at the undergraduate level for four years, and is interested in music.



Nagini Prasad has a Masters in sustainable development and conservation biology. She was in the corporate and NGO sectors prior to joining the field of education. Apart from the junior school, Nagini is also interested in pottery, art, craft and exploring the landscapes around campus.



Kavya A Biradar has an MA from Dharwad University. She teaches languages at CFL. She is interested in the literatures of various languages.



Radhika Neelakantan studied biology for her degree. She taught at The Blue Mountain School, Ooty, before coming to CFL. She has a keen interest in art.



Keerthi Mukunda received her Masters in education from the University of Massachusetts and taught for a few years in a public school in Amherst before joining CFL. She has a particular interest in teaching and developing curricula in the areas of English and social studies.



Raghubram studied computer science in Allahabad and completed his Masters at the University of Texas at Austin. In CFL, he currently teaches mathematics and environmental management.



Rupa Suresh has a Masters in Human Resource Management and a Diploma in Montessori Studies. She enjoys working with children and is most fascinated by the young ones' urge to learn. She has worked with children between 2 and 9 years of age for over six years before becoming a part of the CFL community. Her areas of interest include pottery, craft, music and dance.



Vandana Srivastava worked in the private sector for a few years after completing the MBA program at the Asian Institute of Management, Manila. She worked in the junior and middle school at CFL for several years. Currently, she helps in looking after one of the four hostels on campus while pursuing interests in pottery and dhrupad.



Shashidhar Jagadeeshan has a PhD in mathematics from Syracuse University. He has taught mathematics to students from middle school to undergraduate level.



Venkatesh Onkar completed his A levels at CFL and went on to obtain a BA in Literature from the University of London and an MA from Fordham University, New York. He teaches English and Sociology at CFL. He has a keen interest in music.



Srinivasan K obtained a PhD in Astrophysics from IUCAA, Pune after an MSc in Physics from IIT (Madras). He teaches Mathematics, Physics and General Science in CFL. He is interested in Yoga and plays the Mridangam.



Venu has degrees in Engineering from the University of Madras and Management from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. He helps with administration and finance and has taught social science in the senior school.



Thejaswi Shivanand was educated at the University of Mysore and National Centre for Biological Sciences (TIFR). At CFL, he teaches biology, statistics and geography to older students and enjoys long walks with the younger ones. He is interested in natural history, travel, music and more recently, pottery.



Yasmin Jayathirtha has an MSc from IIT (Bombay) and a PhD in chemistry from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. She did post doctoral work at the University of Louisville and the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.



Therlingappa is from an engineering background. Later, he was drawn into working with alternative education, alternative agriculture and rural livelihoods. He worked in a research institute (an NGO) for more than fifteen years. At CFL, he helps coordinate administrations.

Associates



Leela Garady has an MA in Hindi from Bangalore University. She has developed new ways of teaching language to children. She has written and directed plays in Kannada and Hindi for the students at CFL.



Richard Fernandes has an MSc in Physics from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur and a PhD from the Raman Research Institute, Bangalore. He was a research associate at the University of Louisville and later worked at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.



Usha Mukunda studied English literature in Calcutta and later took a post graduate degree in Library Science from the Bangalore University. She is deeply interested in nurturing discerning readers and users of the library, not only at CFL but in all places where children abide.



Valli Seshan has spent a large part of her working life with non governmental organisations engaged in development work. She has worked for Action Aid, helped start SEARCH and coordinated the International Resource Centre of Service Civil International.

Centre For Learning is a registered charitable society. Donations to the society are exempt from Income Tax to the extent provided for under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

CENTRE FOR LEARNING

Campus: Village Varadenahalli, Bachenhatti Post Magadi Taluk, Ramanagara District 562 120 India
Phone: +91-92415-81342 / 81345, +91-8118-7705749
Mailing Address: 545, Banagiri Nagar, Banashankari 3rd Stage, Bangalore 560 085, India.
email: info@cfl.in, url: www.cfl.in

