

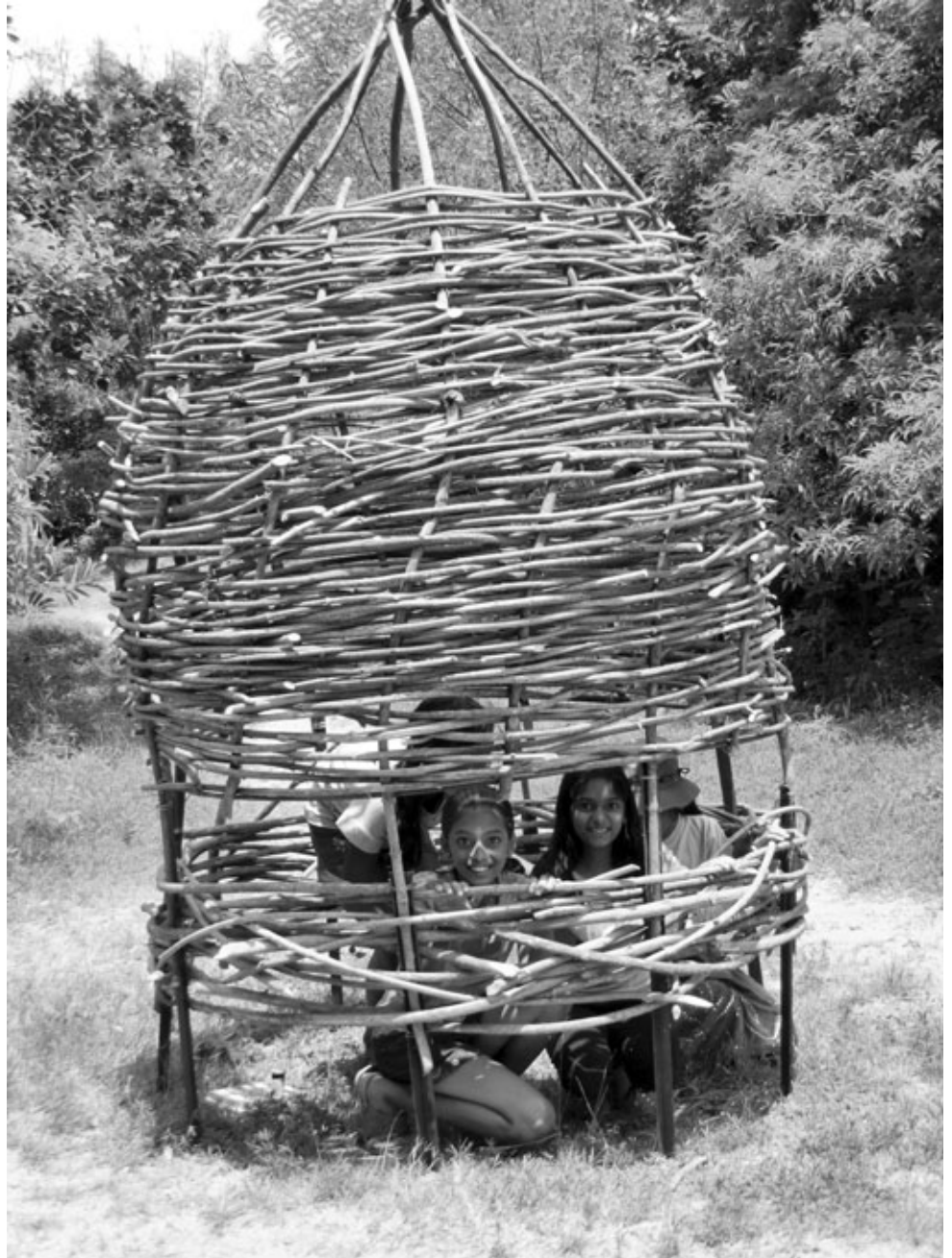
*A working model is not something to be copied; it is to afford a demonstration of the feasibility of the principle, and of the methods which make it feasible... We want here to work out the problem of unity, the organization of the school system in itself, and to do this by relating it so intimately to life as to demonstrate the possibility and necessity of such organization for all education.*

*John Dewey, School and Society (1900)*

There are many reasons why we would like CFL to be a small school. However, when people visit us or hear about us, they often raise doubts about the validity of the “small school” model. We have never dismissed these questions as irrelevant, and we have tried to engage with the various assumptions behind differing arguments for the “ideal” school size. We feel that now is a good opportunity to look at this question afresh.

A primary motive for remaining at about seventy students and fifteen full-time adults is to allow a rich sense of relatedness and community. Our intent is to render the structure of daily thought and emotion transparent. After all, only through understanding all the facets of human nature as reflected in our daily lives, we believe, can we intelligently address societal problems. Small numbers make this process almost unavoidable. We find that there is a possibility of being more than merely acquainted with every single individual in the school: colleagues, children, and, by extension, parents. We have to acknowledge and work with each others’ feelings, opinions and points of view. Our daily interactions are rarely superficial. They may be emotionally charged, positively or negatively, but they can’t be shallow. The human tendency, either subtly or obviously, is to build walls around ourselves and our chosen circle. In a small school, this is difficult to accomplish!

If we want to retain the quality of conversations and interactions in the community that we currently enjoy, but with a larger student population, we would have to increase teacher numbers. Our daily work is



punctuated by numerous little “meetings,” bemoaned by all but invaluable to this education! Could we not keep this spirit going, but with, say, twenty-five adults? To be a non-hierarchical teacher-run school, it seems that we can’t have coherent weekly meetings with twenty-five people, all of whom have to dialogue and make decisions together.

Like any institution, we have certain expectations of ourselves. For us, these are less in the realm of performance and appearance and more to do with attitudes and inten-

tions. For example, we value a sense of care, ownership and initiative when it comes to our immediate environment. If we were dealing with larger numbers, we would, understandably, have to settle for a scenario where some individuals rise to these expectations and some do not. Small numbers help us all hold each other to our responsibilities, with affection and integrity. The hope behind these processes is that the quality of care and attention given to the patterns of everyday life will persist when we meet the “world outside.”

Small numbers also make changes, large and small, easier to implement, like steering a scooter rather than a big truck. There are constant adjustments we make to respond to the challenges of running a school every day. Whether it is adjusting our cooking rotas because of an upcoming drama performance, or meeting each and every parent of the school one month regarding our fees and finances, we have found it easy to make important and meaningful decisions without being bogged down by our own weight.

You may have noticed that we have not mentioned “individual attention” as a reason for being a small school. Of course, being small implies that each child gets a great deal of attention (more perhaps than she wants!) from both adults and peers. We are more in touch with the child’s world than would be possible with larger numbers. However, when parents express a wish for individual attention for their child, it often means that they would like their child’s individuality to be nurtured. In other words, to develop a personality with its strong preferences, opinions and habits. Though this may sound like a good thing to do, this kind of attention, in our perception, is actually detrimental to the well being of the child and community. We would rather give attention, not to indulge emotional patterns, but to try and understand them. We would rather learn together about carrying the self lightly.

Having made this choice to remain small, there are some difficulties we face. Peer group sizes can become too small, especially in the senior school. Students can sometimes find such classes stifling: there are no back benches to hide in, no anonymity, and same-age friends must be found from among a limited selection of peers.

At the level of the organization, the question of finances looms large. We don’t want the cost of this education to spiral out of control (as it easily can). Therefore, we have to work with a relatively small budget: our costs and fees per student are lower than those of much

larger schools, even though our teacher-student ratio is roughly 1:7! To keep costs down, we control expenses (including teacher salaries) tightly. We are fortunate to receive donations from friends around the world every year, but even these must be managed and spent carefully to keep ourselves financially stable.

The most disquieting question we face regarding being small goes something like this: how, in a country like India, can so many resources be poured into so few children?

To us, it seems that there are two ways in which to address the needs of any society. The first way is to try to reach and impact as many individuals as possible through one’s initiative. In education, this could translate into transmitting basic education to very large numbers. Obviously, this is important and necessary. Equally validly, we could attempt in-depth investigations that could have ramifications on the way education might be conceived at all levels. In our case, this investigation depends on our staying small. It is nonetheless a saddening fact that only a few can have a CFL education. Our impulse has been to share our ideas and learning with a wider educational circle, and to give energy and time as adults to this endeavour. We write articles, conduct workshops, give presentations, and spend a lot of time through the year with numerous visitors and organizations doing educational work in India.

In our view, there is no satisfactory answer that any single school can give to the numbers question. There are upwards of 200 million children of school-going age, between the ages of six and fourteen, in India. What is a reasonable number of students for a school to take on to make a meaningful difference? Perhaps societies have severely underestimated the actual energy and resources necessary to intelligently bring up our children. We believe that radically different, richer models of schooling are possible, if only the current debates on education widen their scope.





### Who says Sunday's a holiday?

Some habits are good. The monthly Sunday meeting in school, for example. A forum where parents and teachers meet regularly to talk. Where all adults involved with this education actively participate in its thinking and working. Where in their busy schedule, teachers and parents make the time to travel all the way to school to share questions. These questions may not even seem directly relevant to one's own child and her particular achievements in school, but touch matters of far greater consequence.

We meet because we are friends now. Together we have decided that the questions raised in these meetings are important to us. Such talking also enables working together. And so we must meet and talk about education, learning and living.

Such regular meetings are surprisingly difficult to sustain. They are not aimed at entertainment, and they cannot be preachy or insensitive to the participants' feelings about them. It is difficult to dialogue when there are no miraculous guarantees offered. No promises of quelling doubts once and for all. But there is the promise of sincerity in conversation, a sincerity that comes out of interest in the welfare of oneself, others and the world at large.

Talking about ourselves and our worldviews poses its own challenges. And talking about our inner worlds is far more threatening and uncomfortable, it seems. It makes us vulnerable to others, our inner feelings open to view. Sunday meetings struggle with some recurrent questions about lifestyle, the media and sexuality. To what extent

are these "repetitive" for teachers and older parents? What aspects do we pursue and which preoccupations may we suspend?

As teachers of the school, our responsibility is to allow the questions from these meetings to inform our attitudes while we work intensively with children. Often the modality of these meetings itself becomes an important discussion amongst teachers. Some overarching questions are always on the teachers' minds: To what extent do we speak and to what extent do we listen? What new questions may come on board? How may we revisit the intentions of the school? How do all these discussions create the ethos of the school?

For parents of the school, while there is much appreciation and engagement with these meetings, there have been many worries too: some explicit and shared, others felt and withheld. Does the school have some undisclosed agenda? Isn't the school sounding right-wing-ish?...left-wing-ish?...rudderless?...too radical? Why this preoccupation with our inner worlds? Must we talk about all this at all?

Almost all kinds of questions have a place in these dialogues, so long as they are brought to the forum with care and stamina, as dialogue seems to need both these. Currently, we feel our meetings do offer such opportunities for dialogue. Regardless of levels of enthusiasm or reluctance, through doubts and trepidations, through both conflicts and shared meaning, the Sunday meetings have survived. And we think they must. For surely, we have time for each other as friends. Not mere acquaintances for the moment, but friends who take each other seriously, sharing our ideas and fears alike.

## Nature curriculum in the junior school

A large white chart paper on a wall in the junior school building reads, 'Curious Naturalists Ask':

*Below it children have written in all shapes, sizes and colours: Are there some seeds that grow in all kinds of weather? How can you tell a weed from a plant? Can we tame a bird in the wild? Can you grow a plain bean pod in the mud? Do plants always have seeds? How do birds fly? Can all the seeds from a fruit or vegetable or flower grow? How did man first become alive?*

These were questions that had emerged halfway through the year of the 'Nature Journey' Curriculum in the junior school (ages 6-9). Nature observation, walks and land work have all always occupied an integral part of an experience at CFL. In term-long studies or year-long melas, adults and children have both shared the discoveries and the hard work! But this year, for the first time in the junior school, we launched into a year-long Nature Journey Program (actually a term coined by a junior school child last year!) The program included:

- land work: preparation of beds, seed sowing, weeding, harvesting, cooking, and saving of seeds for the next cycle
- campus walks (with an emphasis on birds and flowering trees)
- sensorial activities and games to draw the children's attention to our natural neighbours

Aspects of poetry, mathematics, craft, artwork, sketching and research processes, came into the children's classes. A range of games and activities related to the immediate environment (eg Tree Tag, Feel a Tree, Bat and Moth, Scavenger Hunts, Un-nature Trail) and later to the bigger picture (eg Web of Life, Pyramid of Life, Recipe for a Forest) were done as part of the program.

*One June night, the children gather near the dining hall, and are led by a teacher to an area of bushy growth, a minute or so away. They stand silently in the pitch dark and look. Then they become visible: fireflies weave their ways through the branches, blinking now and again. It is a magical sight: a world away from the after-dinner noise and action!*



Perhaps it was this experience that inspired the junior school teachers to name the three vertical nature groups Fireflies, Butterflies and Dragonflies. One is tempted to picture a visitor, who hears the teachers shout, "Butterflies, fireflies, dragonflies, come and gather here!!" Does he or she marvel at this wonderful communion we seem to have with the insect world?

From our diaries:

\* During a scavenger hunt, when asked to choose something that reminded him of himself, a child brings a seedpod and says, "I chose it because this is noisy and I am also noisy".

\* A child sees some mushrooms near the steps outside the junior school and remarks, "There are pasta shaped mushrooms here!"

\* When looking at an egg a child exclaims, "So..so..so.....excellent!"

\* After weeding stylosanthus, a pile forms: the children jump on it calling it a "trampoline".

\* For twenty minutes, seven children watch a baby dragonfly in the water stalk tadpoles.

\* Another day, a boy watches a dewdrop hanging from the tip of a leaf.

\* "How did the centipede die?" asks a child after passing a decaying centipede on stone steps.

Jun, 2011: We had prepared six beds for growing vegetables and as we stood looking at them, a child wondered: What were the first plants on earth? We followed up on that a couple of weeks later by visiting ancient plants such as mosses, ferns and liverworts, right on our own campus.

Jun, 2011: In the evening walk, as we went past the vegetable garden, we all saw a green bird with an orange beak feasting on the very large agave flower, which was shooting out of the agave plant. It was a parakeet and we all noticed how messily it was eating the flower. We continued on our walk and after half an hour, as we retraced our steps coming back to the agave flower, the parakeet was still there! We also noticed that the centipede on the steps had decayed more. We found an exoskeleton of a beetle and some children

wanted to dig a 'grave' for it. Towards the end of the walk we stopped at a pomegranate tree near the vegetable garden and looked at all the stages: buds, flowers, and fruits. A little later, one child wanted to know what the lantana fruits looked like, so we saw the berries and tasted them.

Jul, 2011: Curious to grow vegetables from something other than seeds, we plant potato eyes and garlic pods in the soil. Weeks later, stalks, leaves and roots emerge from the potato eyes. At one point, eager to see the harvest, we gently dig up the soil under the potato plants and check. There are small brown balls at the ends of the roots! Quickly we rebury them to see if those mini potatoes will grow further. Sure enough we get a bigger harvest, later! We prepare an exotic dish: *Organic Garden Fresh Potato Bean and Basil Salad!*

Sep, 2011: We saw 2 blue faced malkohas, 3 mynas in flight, 1 cattle egret, 1 baby red whiskered bulbul, 2 yellow billed babblers, 1 hare, and frog hopper bubbles on the grasses. We were led by one of the dragonflies.

Oct, 2011: Weeded beds... collected and counted bhindi seeds...harvested lettuce and tomatoes... planted flower seeds... prepared



stone path around the sculpture... created flower patches outside the classrooms.

Jan, 2012: Saved avarekai and velvet bean seeds; harvested last of noolkol, french beans and katte soppu (spinach) and served...*Noolkol and Greens Stir Fry!*

(On harvesting, we always estimated the number or weight of vegetables and then checked our estimates.)

Why were we setting out to do all this? We were keen to deepen in children (and ourselves too!) such sensibilities as quiet observation and listening; the ability to discover worlds in the smallest of leaves and

the almost invisible spider webs, worlds that were equally dramatic, indeed even more so, than those the nature shows and media portrayed. We hoped students would sustain energy observing cycles in the natural world around us (like spending a few weeks watching a cocoon!), not just wanting quick results.. This was the end of the first year of the nature journey curriculum, and we are in the process of developing it as a three year program. At the end of the day, we want children to have a fondness for and relationship with the spaces and living things around them!





## Our open kitchen

Our Open Kitchen is a nothing short of a miracle, held together by good intentions and endless lists. We have wanted to feature it in a newsletter for a while, and in this issue we decided that one way to do it would be to describe all the various kinds of people that walk in and out of our Open Kitchen. The only reason our kitchen works is because all the work is divided among all of us, from six-year-olds upwards. No one escapes this. In such a participative kitchen, several important lessons can be conveyed. We learn that 'healthy' and 'yummy' can go together, and that cooking can be a pleasurable activity, not only a chore. It also becomes clear how much work goes into making what we eat (growing, harvesting, transporting, cooking, serving), so that we become very reluctant to waste food. In many ways, we hope the students learn that wholesome, good food is something never to be taken for granted.

Not having employed a catering service to take charge of the kitchen does have serious consequences. There is a need for a Kitchen Manager, and this person has to come from among the teachers. Beyond the obvious tasks, such a person would need to manage the kitchen staff sensitively, coordinate the hours of work put in by teachers, parents and students through the year, and source healthy organic ingredients. However, running our own kitchen does make it possible for us to retain a say in the eating habits of the community. We can make decisions regarding ingredients and menus flexibly. The students and teachers have a high sense of ownership for the kitchen, however much some may like to complain about the food!

And now, to give you a sense of the way the kitchen runs, we introduce the people who inhabit it.

**Kitchen Manager:** One of the teachers, who volunteers for this responsibility in April for the coming year. Starts the year enthusiastically, with several ground-breaking ideas. By the end of his tenure, is eagerly looking out for a successor. We must beware his sharp eye, for it may come to rest on any of us, especially if we make one too many intelligent suggestions regarding the running of the kitchen.



**Volunteer parent on lunch duty:** Brave and upbeat, very hardworking, uncomplaining about state and choice of vegetables in storeroom, pulls off amazing meals week after week.



**Kitchen Staff:** Multilingual high speed chopper, super strong biceps, insulated fingers, reassuring and reliable.



**Experienced teacher on cooking duty:** Plans menu in advance so that special ingredients can be ordered, makes a delicious meal usually including dessert. Probably could do this blindfolded and with one hand tied behind back. In contrast to –

**Hapless teacher on cooking duty:** Finds himself in kitchen at 5pm with instructions to have dinner ready by 7pm or else. Kitchen staff smilingly leave by 5:30pm on various other chores, expressing high degree of confidence in hapless teacher.

**Student in kitchen community work:** Brisk and efficient, enjoys chatting, highly skilled in peeling/chopping/squeezing lemons, veteran of at least two chopping injuries, excellent at spotting worms in bhindi.



**Junior student in kitchen community work:** Armed and dangerous!

**Breakfast rota student:** Groggy and grumpy, yet blessedly willing to wake at 5:45 am once every week to make breakfast for the whole school.

**Senior student on lunch rota:** Responsible, often bossy, good at ordering younger rota students around. See below.

**Junior student on lunch rota:** In the beginning, slightly starry eyed, even excited at being old enough for lunch rota. Gradually realizes his place in the hierarchy as week after week he is made to empty the compost. In a few years will turn into Senior student on lunch rota (see above).



**Unsuspecting guest:** Arrives with an expectation of learning about education and attending classes under the trees; is soon equipped with cutting board and knife and placed squarely in kitchen.

**Consumer (7 years old):** Skilled in the art of separating cooked food into piles of composite ingredients (eg., tomatoes here, pumpkin there, dal here, jeera seeds there), to be studied at leisure.

**Consumer (teacher):** Grateful to be able to land up at meal times and be served hot, tasty food day after day!

## News of the year

The second term saw a joint project in science with class 6 students of CFL and classes 4 and 5 of the Varadenahalli village school. The CFL students would learn something through experiments and worksheets on Wednesdays, and prepare demonstrations based on what they had learned for the Varadenahalli children on Fridays. This is a model of engaging with the village school children that we have used before, previously in an art class. It works well when the CFL students are a little older and see themselves as mentors, actually teaching some skill or concept that they have learned. If they have learned it as recently as a few days ago, they can even use the teaching methods used on them! One of the things we have learned is that language is not a serious barrier in these interactions. Even when a CFL student is struggling in Kannada class, he or she somehow manages to communicate and convey a significant amount. Judicious pairing or grouping, and a good deal of planning are essential to the success of these term-long projects.

In the third term, the senior-most students engaged with students of classes 4, 5 and 6 of two neighbouring government schools once a week, working on spoken English and drama skills. They designed and played games with the children that helped with everyday conversations, as well as with letting go some inhibitions! After an initial period of shyness, the village students really got into it, playing all games with gusto and, when the scripts were written, learning their lines to perfection during the week. The commitment of the government school children to learning and trying what was shared with them in these sessions was something to behold. Their affection and appreciation of the little we were doing was very apparent. It touched the CFL students' hearts and spurred them on to put more energy into the activities. In March they presented some small skits in the assembly. Behind that day's all-too-brief performance were many sweet, funny memories that will remain with all of us who were a part of the programme.

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The Ashwathas, Palashas and Akshas (11 to 13 years old students) were involved in a project on Kabir in the Hindi classes from January to March. As Hindi is not in the daily environment of the students, the intention was to use a project to make the language come alive. Having sung many of Kabir's dohas in assembly over the years, these became the starting point of the project. Many of Kabir's dohas (couplets) were studied. These were compiled into a booklet, with the original dohas written and the translation presented alongside, in simple Hindi.

The students got a glimpse of Kabir's life through the various anecdotes studied. The project culminated with the students enacting two such anecdotes converted into skits. These explored Kabir's view on religion. They also presented the concluding part of 'Kabir Khada Bazaar Mein', a play written by Bhishma Sahni, to the parents at the end of the year.



Many other plays were performed during the year in many languages! Some were adaptations of pre-existing works, others were written by parents and teachers. We all enjoyed these presentations immensely. Many of these plays were presented at a cultural evening at the end of term.

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*In drama you struggle, because you hope you're going to survive. It's utilitarian – sordid. But tragedy is gratuitous. Pointless, irremediable. Fit for a king!* So speaks, wisely, the Chorus in *Antigone*, a play by the French playwright Jean Anouilh, an adaptation of the Greek tragedy by Sophocles. Directed by Gerard Bayle, the Champakas of 2011-12 performed the tragedy for a small audience, after intense preparation over a month. And intense it was. Not just because of the demand of skills required in theatre, but also because of the emotions around human nature, relationships and social mores that the characters displayed. At first, working with a tragedy seemed a wee bit brutal on adolescent children. But the play grew on all of us. The characters were reborn and reinterpreted, only to suffer and die again on stage, irremediably. Tragedy has something to teach us for sure. Things that we avoid about ourselves. *We are alone. The world is empty...* rings the voice of Creon the king to his son Haemon.

As always, we thank Gerard for his intensity and commitment to his work with us, and hope he will be back soon.

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The excursions this year were as usual a varied and challenging set of experiences. The Saralas and Mahuas (ages 6 to 8) visited Sirsi in Western Karnataka, and enjoyed the hospitality of Sunita Rao of Vanastree. The Bilvas (9 year olds) went to the south-west, and spent time at Mangalore and Kumta. The Tamalas (age 10) did a sweep of Kerala, visiting places of natural beauty and historical significance at Palakkad, Thrishur and Alleppey, while the Ashwatthas (age 11) travelled across Andhra. The Palashas and Akshas (ages 12 and 13)

remained in Karnataka; they too visited Vanastree in Sirsi, staying for several days in village homes in the area. Before this, they visited Bijapur and Badami, Pattadakal and Aihole. The Ketakis and Parijatas (ages 14 and 15) trekked the Sahyadri range in the Western Ghats. The senior school (Champakas and Sevantikas) spent two weeks in Mozda, Gujarat, working with Michael Mazgaonkar of the Mozda Collective.

Of course, as usual, some of the students visited GBS in Wyanad this year. The Aksha and Ketaki students were at the Sanctary for two weeks, intensely immersed in the various activities of the community in the rainforest!

We would like to thank all the schools, organizations and individuals who hosted us and gave generously of their time and energy.

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If you have not been to CFL in the last one year or so, then you are in for a big surprise! Stone by stone, the arrival area of our campus is being landscaped. The central area just below the old volleyball court and in front of the kitchen and dining areas posed, in past years, many challenges. The land sloped from west to east towards the kitchen and so in the rainy season this created erosion of soil in the upper areas and silting and slushy mud pools (yummy for the juniors!) in the lower area. In the dry season, a favourite space for all kinds of games played by the juniors was a dust bowl.

To address these problems, and to improve the aesthetics of the main arrival area of the school, we have undertaken a major landscaping project. Sandy, a former student and a current staff member, is the chief architect, mason and labour force behind this project. To achieve our goals, we have raised the upper area by nearly four feet, and to retain the soil two sets of parallel walls are being built. This dry wall construction is being built stone by stone by Sandy. Apart from being very beautiful, this will serve as seating for outdoor meals and meetings and will also create a lovely garden space.

We have made sure the water now drains away from the field and enters the main nala running along the spine of our campus. Great care has been taken to use waste material, and the soil came from a local farmer who needed to regrade his property.

Come enjoy the new space the next time you are at CFL!







Thanks to a generous donation, we have constructed a carpentry shed on campus. We plan to use this space to conduct woodcarving activities as well basic carpentry workshops in the near future. Hopefully all on campus will feel inspired to plane and saw!

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In June 2011, we had a half-day meeting with alumni of the school, in order to begin a discussion on questions in our lives, very much in the spirit of our Sunday meetings with parents. Based on feedback from the alumni, we would like to continue these interactions, perhaps not just limited to one day but stretching over a day and a half and incorporating many activities as well.

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The focus of the Senior General Studies programme in 2011-12 was to connect to the local landscape. The students tried their hand at understanding the geology, ecology, watershed and socio-economics of the landscape through walks, hands-on exercises and reading. They shared their learning through a guided tour of the campus that incorporated games and participatory exercises suitable for various age-groups. They also interacted with primary school children from the Varadenahalli and Bachenahatti schools and presented a few plays as part of the exercise. We thank Kade Finoff, Chaiti Seth, Shane Warner and Gerard Bayle for being part of the GS programme for the year.

## People

We are happy to welcome Yashodhara to the CFL community. She will be working mainly in the library across many age groups, and will also be involved with the language programme. Raghuram will be moving to other projects and interests, after having been with us for three years. Aparna will not be in the library, but we hope to see her on campus regularly. Maitreyi will be pursuing her academic interests in Culture Studies; we wish her all the very best. Lalitha's involvement with the daily functioning of the school will not be as regular as before, but she promises to be here as much as possible! We are happy that Sandy and Sruti will continue to live and work at CFL the coming year (their baby Sarayu has brought much energy and joy to our lives!) Anjappa (Anji) has joined as part of our staff community, and he works in the kitchen and helps maintain the campus.

We have had many visitors over the past year. Dan from the UK was at CFL in the first term, in his gap year. He helped us immensely in many areas, mainly with the sports programme. Kara, from Brockwood, stayed at CFL in the third term. She studied biology and psychology, and also contributed in many meaningful ways.

Shane and Chaiti were very involved with the land and gardening programme. In the second term, working with children across many age groups, they harvested 400kgs of vegetables! We are happy that they are returning to CFL the coming year.

Steve and Wendy, former Brockwood teachers and old friends of the school, spent a week with us, interacting with both teachers and students. Derek, also an old friend, gave us a taste of his fine storytelling skills and promised to be back!

There are many people to thank over this past year for all their support. Usha spent a week giving a library a boost. Kade guided the seniors' GS programme in the first term, studying ideas in the economics of poverty. As in past years, Leela has been very involved with the language programme. Krishna, a former student, is helping guide the A level Design and Technology course with invaluable inputs.



## Dialogue through the ages

*What do you think dialogue is all about?*

"We think of all the bad things we have done and we share it!" comes a quick reply from a junior school child. "It is about confessing," offers another generously, much to the amusement of the adults who may have a fleeting comical vision of themselves sitting at the receiving end in a confessional box! These children are not entirely incorrect; sometimes the discussions are about actual "wrongdoings." However, we don't stop at the discussion of the incident and those involved. Be it children in the age group 6-9 years, pre-teens, teenagers or young adults, the incidents may vary, but the themes that emerge are remarkably the same. Of course, these themes are relevant for us adults as well.

The question *Why do we talk behind other peoples' backs?*, raised by a middle schooler, is as relevant for a nine year old as it is for a nineteen, thirty-nine or a ninety year old. For the nine-year old, it may be grounded in a particular incident, with particular people. Finger pointing could be the starting point of the discussion. "He did!", "She did!" and so on. Often, in the course of discussion, this moves to a

reflection, at least for that moment, to "I did too" or "I also do." For some children, that moment doesn't last very long but for others, even at this age, it becomes a part of their way of processing the world. For instance, in a discussion about a peer who often got easily upset, an eight-year old asked: *How can you say you have made up your mind not to get upset when it is the same mind that is making you upset?* This offers more food for thought.

As we move on to 12 to 13 years olds, we notice that the students are able to start turning the questions around to themselves on their own in remarkable ways. There is the possibility to move away from a particular incident to a more general inquiry with questions such as *How does it make me feel when I gossip and why? Why do I feel anger/ jealousy/insecurity/a sense of division and what does it do to me? Why am I restless or bored? Why do certain things make me feel happy and what does this do to me?* and so on. Students sometimes share candidly from their own lives, both personal and at school. At times, when questions like *Why do we have to keep asking why?* or *Do we have to talk about fear again?* arise, the half-joking response from the adult may be, "Well, if you have solved the issue of fear and aren't scared of anything



anymore, we needn't talk about it!" The children roll their eyes in mock irritation and we move on – either to continue talking about fear, or to their (momentary) relief, bring in a new theme of anyone's choice.

The senior school students may engage in a discussion on the role of their consciousness in the crises of the world, how their relationships operate from images (positive or negative) they have of each other, whether they can be skeptical of the absolute "truth" of their feelings or emotions, about the nature and existence of the self, and so on. Again, a frank sharing by both adults and students, an ability to look inward and an interest to carry the discussion forward, are essential. Some students may argue, *You have been doing this for twenty years and haven't come to any answers. Most others who are not interested in all this seem to be living just fine. So why must we ask all this of ourselves?* It is not always easy to respond to this. Firstly, the assumption that the 'others' they refer to are 'fine' is not apparent at all. Further, asking such questions of oneself and each other does not guarantee arriving at a state of happiness. We ask these questions because they seem important, shake us out of our comfort zone and hopefully will



inform our approach to life. Submitting to a guru or religion doesn't seem to work. We are left with the same questions, or perhaps more questions arise: what is the role of religion in creating feelings of division in society?

After much discussion, sharing and some moments of insight, we often catch the children and ourselves indulging in behaviours and patterns which we may have just put under the scanner! And back to the drawing board we go – to err is human after all! But there seems to be some learning in the process: the eight year old boy who at the beginning of the year had thought dialogue was all about sharing the "bad things" we do, now says, "It is about what is on our mind." Well, one hopes this is not limited to the "bad things" we do!

## Friends of CFL

Like all educational endeavours, CFL receives financial support beyond the fees paid by parents. We have a global community of friends and well-wishers whose donations have helped our work continue for 22 years. Every donation, no matter what the amount, strengthens the network of relationships on which CFL depends.

As part of our ongoing fund-raising work, we wish to consolidate what could be considered a 'micro-charity' programme. The idea is to have a large number of friends willing to commit a small donation every year for a period of, say, five years. Our target is to raise around twenty lakh rupees every year. For example, we could accomplish this by finding 400 donors willing to give us 5000 rupees (\$90) a year! We are excited at the prospect that a simple scheme such as this can take care of our financial needs in the long run.

If you would like to be a part of the Friends of CFL programme, please write us an email at [info@cfl.in](mailto:info@cfl.in), with 'Friends of CFL' in the subject and we will initiate the process with you.







We are happy to invite applications from individuals interested in self enquiry, who have specific skills to offer in terms of teaching, administrative duties and pastoral care. Applicants should be excited by living on a campus in a rural setting. Please email us (subject: Teacher Application) if you are interested in working with us. Please send us a brief write-up with your background, explaining your interest in education generally and in CFL in particular.

**Donor information: 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. If you wish to avail tax exemption in the USA, please email us for details.**

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