

CFL Newsletter

Issue 1

February, 1995

It is a warm February afternoon at CFL. The monthly parent-teacher meeting is in session in a large, airy room nearby. Rani, the school dog, sniffs around a stone bench and flops down beside it, shaded by the generous branches of a palm tree. Voices of students who couldn't keep away even on a holiday (!) float across from the computer room. We are 12 km. away from the noise and bustle of Bangalore city, on a farm named Shibumi. CFL has been here since '94, and looks to stay indefinitely. Much has happened at the school since our last newsletter, and we are writing to keep you in touch.

The post school program

We have long felt that there is a need in India for an undergraduate alternative which offers a flexible course, an excellent education, and the space for personal enquiry. In response to this, we have started a highly individualized program for six undergraduate students. The plan is to arrange for our post-school students to work or apprentice with excellent professionals in their areas of interest, while enrolling in a formal and recognised degree program. We have taken great care to identify qualified professionals to guide the work of each student. Avinash trains in art with Andrea, an Italian designer currently living in Bangalore. Sirish plans to register for an undergraduate programme in the life sciences. He has



spent the last few months working in a botanical sanctuary in a rainforest in Wynad, Kerala. Professors at research institutions in Bangalore teach Arjun economics and Venku philosophy. CFL staff teach courses in mathematics and sociology for Keshav and Arjun respectively. Amol is preparing for his chartered accountancy with Gopalan. A few of our post-school students teach younger students at CFL.

New curriculum for the youngest

At CFL, the students are divided into four age groups - Vasantha (5-10 yrs), Grishma (10-12 yrs), Varsha (13-16 yrs) and the A-level (17-18 yrs). A new curriculum has been implemented for the Vasanthas - thrice weekly they are taken on a long walk in the land surrounding Shibumi. We feel it is important to awaken their senses to their natural surroundings. They are encouraged to explore the plant, animal and insect life along the way, using senses of touch, sight, smell and



hearing. Time is also spent examining a plant or tree closely, sketching, writing about, and sharing their observations. In-class academic work is limited to the afternoon hours. The experience has been exciting for children and teachers alike.

Rainforest trips for the Varshas

The Varsha students have started spending three weeks each year in Wynad, a tropical rainforest in Kerala.

Rare tropical plants are being collected and studied in a botanical sanctuary run by Wolfgang, a conservationist and horticulturist who has lived at Wynad for 25 years or so. The students participate in the daily work of the place, learning invaluable lessons about living and working with nature. Over the past two years or so, the sanctuary at Wynad and CFL have developed a close and mutually rewarding relationship. We have brought plants from the sanctuary for CFL, monstera and heliconia among others. A few teachers and older students recently cycled all the way from Bangalore to Wynad - a journey of over 300 kilometres!

Activities for the Grishmas

A year ago, it was felt that the Grishma group would benefit from increased interaction with children and adults in and out of CFL. A tendency to become self-absorbed and insensitive sometimes appears in the preadolescent years, and it was thought that more opportunity should be given for them to meet and work with various people. We also wanted to get them working with their hands, so we added several activities to their curriculum. Over the course of a year, they were taught Kasuti (a style of embroidery native to Karnataka), bicycle maintenance, book binding, stationery making, origami, carpentry and dance drama. Their teachers included school parents, older students, and teachers both in and out of CFL.

Serious Adventures

Some months ago, an interesting group of young adults was introduced to us. They call themselves the Adventurers, and they came together initially as casual hikers and trekkers. Over the

years, they began to see firsthand the deterioration of the forests and mountains they loved. So they decided to devote their energies to educating people on the conservation of nature (especially in the Western Ghats of India). They do this through outdoor activities with children and adults. Our students and many of the teachers have spent time with them doing coastal trekking and watersports (in the Ghats) and rock-climbing.

The Art Studio

Vishakha, our art teacher, is creating an art curriculum for five of our A-level students. She has started this 'from scratch', using input from the students as well. Assignments are created and modified as her students discover their own styles. Slideshows on art are presented. We are also attempting to make connections with art colleges in the country, for those of our students who wish to take up art seriously.

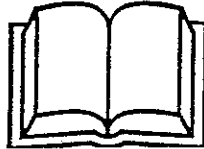


Just outside the art studio is a beautiful little garden, landscaped by Sandy, a CFL student. Wild orchids, philodendron, lillies and sculptures hand-fashioned by the children during a one-week workshop with a clay artisan, adorn the pebble-strewn plot.

The Library - it's alive!!!

Each group at CFL visits the library for a separate period every week - to browse, borrow and much, much more. Apart from meeting the academic needs of the students (eg., referencing, project writing, etc.), the library has been a place where they are encouraged to love reading for its own sake. Children are involved in just about everything that goes on in the library - decorating it, accessing books, surveying teachers and students on their reading habits, reviewing magazines and books. Recently, the Varshas felt

they had 'outgrown' the library. They'll be taken on the next book buying trip, and asked to buy books which they can be sure they and atleast five others will read.



Our librarian Usha was away at Brockwood Park School in England (as visiting librarian) for much of 1994. The library was well looked after during this time, and several new acquisitions were made. The Encyclopedia Britanica, the Times Atlas of the World, several books and magazine subscriptions are now a part of the CFL library. And hanging from the rafters of the library is a melodious windchime. Magazine subscriptions continue to be a popular donation item among our well wishers. If you or anyone you know is interested in subscribing for a magazine for CFL, please let us know and we'll tell you what we need.

A CFL Menagerie

You already know about our dog, Rani. Then there's Pukel, the black cat. We've also discovered two cobras and a rat snake (which chases the many squirrels). There is a plan under way to find a new home for the cobras, far away from the classrooms (!). Recently a baby nightjar was saved and nursed back to health. The same was tried for a baby squirrel and a baby rabbit, both of which died and were buried. We are building a small pond, too, with lots of tadpoles and small fish swimming around.

Garden Salad

Late in 1993, a visitor from Brockwood Park to CFL started a small vegetable garden on the land. Michael grew radishes, tomatoes and lettuce. And a few months later, the Vasanthas were able to make a delicious salad for

all of CFL to enjoy. Unfortunately, Michael wasn't around to taste the salad,



but he is back this year as new staff, along with another gardener Keerthi. Their plans for landscaping at Shibumi include a nursery, a vegetable garden and a grove of ornamental and fruit trees.

Language classes

Kannada and Hindi are taught at CFL by Leela, among other teachers. She has recently translated seven booklets by Krishnamurti into Kannada, two of which have been published - Book of Life and On Learning. As part of the language program, some of the students went to Rajasthan in '93, and on their return undertook a project to create a 'phad'. This is a picture story painted (in natural colours like turmeric) on a nine-metre strip of cloth, an art form native to the people of Rajasthan. The story was written in Hindi.



For a Kannada project this year, Leela taught the students 'gamaka', a lyrical way of reading old Kannada poetry. Old Kannada is not very different from present-day Kannada, except that they used to combine two or three words into one long compound word. To understand and pronounce these words today is difficult, until one breaks them up into their component words. So the 'gamaka' turned out to be an interesting and enjoyable way to learn Kannada. At the end of this academic year, we will stage two plays from the Mahabharata in Hindi and Kannada.

Connections

Barely five years old, CFL has

developed close relationships with other schools in India and all over the world. Students and teachers from Brockwood Park School in England, and from the Ojai school in California, visit us from time to time. Some of them teach briefly at CFL. In Bangalore, the Valley School and CFL share a few teachers. And many old Valley School students visit us from time to time. Two of our post-school students spent a term at Rishi Valley, studying and teaching. Recently we connected with a rural school in Bangalore called Vikasana. The school was started by David Horsburgh eighteen years ago. Our students go there to learn carpentry, and their students come here to visit our labs, library, and generally take part in whatever we are doing.

On the Stage

In the past year or so, drama classes at CFL have taken on a new role, so to speak. They have become a forum for the exploration of one's emotions, inhibitions and relationships. Drama teacher Gopal has started working with the students on separating the elements of drama - the visual (stage positions and movements), the verbal (intonation and rhythm) and the emotional (expressions and gestures accompanying the movement). After rigorous rehearsals of each, the aspects are brought together. They are also experimenting with heightening awareness of body and senses. Gopal believes these activities allow us to learn about our emotions and possibly even loosen their overwhelming hold on the mind.

We've also had several visitors to CFL hold drama workshops for our stu-



dents. Students have worked on excerpts of plays like 'Evam Indrajit' by Badal Sircar, Cyrano de Bergerac,

Equus by Peter Shaffer, and a James Saunders play.

Fund raising

In January of this year, a new fund raising committee of three staff was formed at CFL. Many of you reading this newsletter are past donors of CFL, and we thank you for showing your appreciation of our endeavour. On our part, we continue to do all we can to stretch the available funds - using low-cost building materials for our classrooms, need-based salaries and pedagogical aids made by the teachers. Nevertheless, there still remains a need for a fairly large sum of money to build classrooms, hostels, etc., and to establish a corpus fund so that the school will not be dependent on the fees for routine expenses. Fund raising involves a lot of work, including contacting trusts, businesses and individuals, writing proposals, expressing clearly the nature and ethos of our school and so on. We're happy to say that the new team is doing well so far. The plan is to raise funds to buy three acres at Shibumi, and build a new library, computer-cum-math lab, physics and chemistry labs, classrooms, etc. The next immediate need is for hostels close to Shibumi for the older students.

A brief word on the hostel

We now have three boys and three girls living with a teacher couple in rented houses on the outskirts of the city (fairly close to the school). The hostel is offered to the older students as an experiment in simple living, to give space for enquiry and to take up responsibilities of living in a community. They have a relaxed routine, participate in the cleaning, cooking and shopping, and play volleyball in the evenings.

We have grown

Since 1993, we have had several teachers join CFL. All of them have an interest in education and the deeper questions of life. Radhika works with the Vasanthas and used to teach at the Blue Mountain school in South India.

She sketches beautifully. Shashidhar has a PhD. in mathematics and teaches the post-school students. He plans to develop a 'mathematics lab' at CFL, and teach math to different age groups as well. Michael was a teacher / gardener at Brockwood Park School in England. Apart from his horticultural skills, he has an undergraduate degree in dance and teaches that to the students. Kamala will teach statistics and psychology to some students beginning next academic year, and plans among other things to work on curriculum development. She has a PhD in Educational Psychology. Keerthi has just returned from England with an undergraduate degree in liberal arts, and a deep love of gardening. She also works with the younger students, and sings beautifully. Deepa is completing a masters in mathematics. She loves music and has learned to play the Carnatic flute. Gopal has both a passion and a flair for drama, and shares it with students of all ages at CFL. He has an undergraduate degree in physics and philosophy from the Open University in England. Vishakha is our artist-in-residence, awakening creativity in our students every day. She has written and illustrated several children's books.

Afterword

That parent-teacher meeting is almost over now. Many of the parents have travelled many kilometres to sit together with the teachers and each other, dialoguing on subjects which touch our lives and those of our children.

We hope you've enjoyed catching up with CFL. So much more has happened than we could possibly include here. But we promise to make these newsletters a regular feature, sending one out every four to six months. Till the next one, then!

Compiled by Kamala V. Mukunda.

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Donors in the U.S.: VSEI (Volunteers in Service to Education in India), a non-profit tax-exempt organisation in the U.S., which is working to help education in India, has taken CFL on as a special project. Donations for CFL must be made out to VSEI, specially earmarked for CFL (a covering letter will help), and mailed to the address below. They will be forwarded to CFL, and are tax-exempt in the U.S.

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