

CfL Newsletter

Issue Ten
2004

Surveying the school from a high vantage point, I'm forcefully struck by the feeling that so much thought and energy from so many people—staff, parents, well-wishers—has gone into making CFL a "perfect" place. But I also have the sense that in the midst of the beauty and complexity of this existence, we might lose track of the basics. What are we here for, and more importantly, what are we not here for? We aren't here with an ideology, a grand plan for improving everybody's life. We see that trap and its dangers quite clearly. Tentatively we might say that we are here to explore—moment by moment—our states of mind. We are here to lose ourselves in that adventure—and it is an adventure to say that we truly have no plans to "improve" psychologically, that we are willing to flow where life might take us. CFL isn't a plan with the purpose of perfection. It's more a celebration of the insight that perfection and reality don't lie at the end of some arduous struggle to build structures and programmes, whether they are physical or psychological.

What makes the Middle School tick?

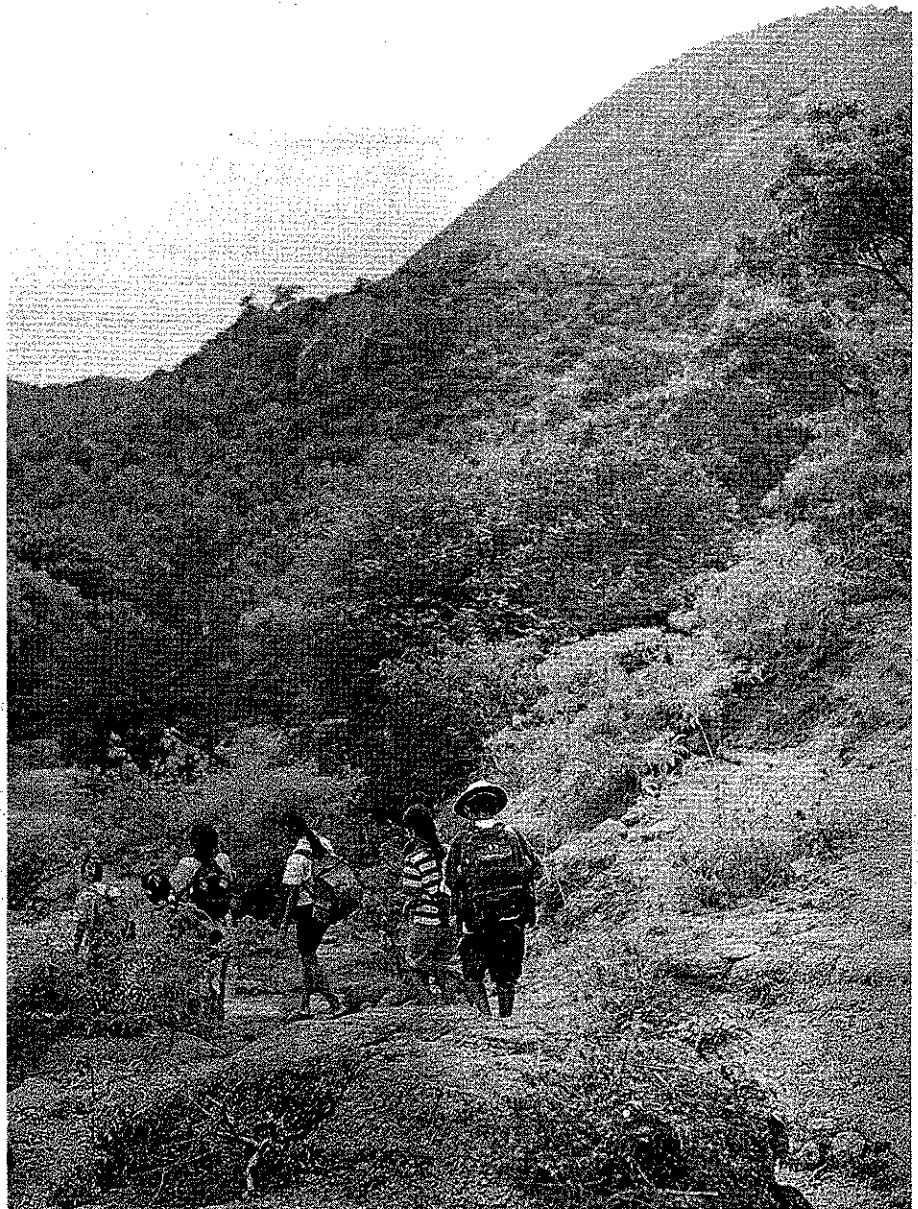
The Middle School (Tamalas and Palashas) consists of four age groups ranging in age from nine to thirteen. Their programme, like every programme in CFL, is fluid and responsive to the students' changing

needs. With their entry into this phase of their education, the children face many changes in their life at CFL. For one thing, they no longer have one single teacher with them for most of their day. In the Tamala and Palasha

groups, children work with many teachers in a range of activities. Some initially feel a bit lost without a single constant adult presence holding them through the day. Others might thrive under this new challenge. Generally the shift also involves learning to make use of free time independently and to plan and organize various tasks. The children, naturally, respond in very different ways to this newly-available time.

"We don't have to be with teachers all the time. We can take care of ourselves. Teachers don't have to be worried about us always."

"I like it when teachers arrange something for us and then we can do what we want."



As the children make this transition, one of the biggest challenges facing the educator is the balancing of their burgeoning intellectual energy and ability with their playful, childlike quality. The temptation is to treat them as older than they actually are, simply because they can grasp a subtle grammatical or mathematical point. But obviously this is not the case. They still burst out unexpectedly into song, giggle helplessly at each other and enjoy the most ridiculous puns and pranks. So the educator has to be very alert to this dual movement in them—a growing maturity on the one hand, and the need for the expression of a very basic childlike energy on the other. It's very easy for the adults to get caught up in one or the other of these aspects.

"When you are Sarakas or Bilvas [Juniors], and when you're Ketakis [9th grade], you won't mind sitting next to a boy or girl. But now [in the Middle School] it matters."

Every parent and educator knows that a growing awareness of physical maturity and sexuality forms a large part of children's lives at this stage. This awareness might manifest itself in many forms—embarrassment, jokes, teasing, the very sharp divide between the sexes ("I *won't* sit next to him/her?"). This last is certainly very deeply rooted, and no amount of "rational" talking seems to have any long lasting impact—and rightly so, for the children's feelings and interpretations of these feelings might totally escape the verbal structures we adults try to grasp them by. How then can an adult meaningfully deal with this issue? The most refreshing aspect of all this is the total openness and willingness on the students' part to share their feelings and to try to figure out their own lives. Either one on one or in a group, they

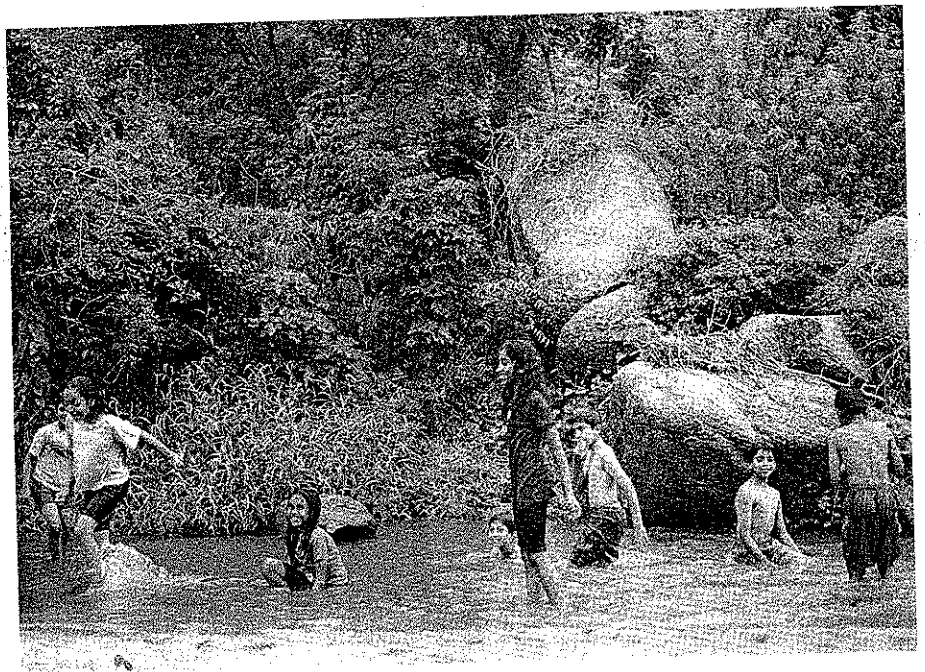
often have a startling ability to cut straight to the point without unnecessary complications.

As all this energy jostles around, we try to bring the children's attention to what it means to work and relate together as a group, to look out for each other, to be sensitive to each other's needs and also to be critical in a constructive way. On the football field, performing a lab experiment, waiting in the queue for lunch to be served—the opportunities for squabbles and misunderstandings are tremendous! By the time the children are in Middle School, they begin to see the challenges that this issue poses: learning is as much about the science experiment as about relating as a group of individuals.



and discuss them one by one—why have humans taken over the world? Why do I feel bored? And so on.

The issue of control is an important point to grapple with. Obviously we



Without at all being under the illusion that we have things *under control*, we nevertheless try to encourage the children to talk about their lives and emotions in any way they can. For the older Palashes, this dialogue happens in Culture classes. The younger Tamalas also have discussion sessions that are quite wide ranging. They write down their questions and put them in a box

don't want to give the children the sense that, as they grow older, they are forced to subject themselves to arbitrary structures outside their control. At the same time, we need to guide them towards working within efficient and common-sensical frameworks, while keeping in mind that they possess a rather vulnerable questioning energy. The journey continues...



When it was rain
 of the dragonflies sheltered in the grass
 or in the trees
 then when the sun came out
 the dragonflies came out again
 and we were surrounded with dragon flies
 and then the next day it rained again
 and again the dragonflies hid
 in the grass or the trees again
 and the sun came out again
 and we observed it
 and we saw dragon flies
 next to the math lab
 and then next to the assembly hall
 the dragon flies look like dragons
 and they fly.

Working for the community

When half-past eight rolls around (give or take a few minutes), most of CFL's denizens are diligently cleaning hostels, chopping vegetables, dusting the library shelves or performing any of the tasks that are an essential part of community life. It's worthwhile reminding ourselves why we do these tasks. Why not hire "part time labour" to do these jobs? That would save time and energy, for sure.

The answer to the question "Why community work?" can come on several fronts. Most obviously, of course, doing our work ourselves generates (we hope) a sense of caring and responsibility towards the place—or towards *any* place. A "place" isn't a resource to use and discard at our pleasure: it needs care and looking after. And we feel strongly that this is not just pious moralizing. The urgency of taking care of *places*—cities, forests, living spaces—has historically never been stronger than now.

Moreover, such a culture of independent work lends a cheerful energetic quality

to our day that would otherwise be conspicuously lacking. We immediately see the impact of our work habits in our environment. Worms appear in casually-cleaned cauliflowers. Dust, dirt, and debris accumulates in corners we didn't even know existed. Someone else has to work harder to make up for our inefficiencies. These realities hit early on, and they are lessons that are not easily forgotten. Hence we bring a cheerful and brisk efficiency to our morning *rotas*.

The interesting question that work of this nature raises is—in what state of mind do we do the work? *Any* work? Immense challenges lurk in the simplest tasks; it seems! Attention seems to be the key to the quality of work. Can I pay complete attention to what I'm doing? These are the discoveries we hope to make as we go along. No quick easy answers. Just a swift glance at the watch...oops, half past eight...time to swab that floor...what was the latest cricket score again?...





A Sense of Place

Through the months of October, November and December, we were hard at work looking at what a "sense of place" means to us. Too often, we felt, we live in very abstract neighbourhoods, filled with ideas and imaginary creatures rather than an awareness of a real place. And so the idea for this year's *mela* was born.

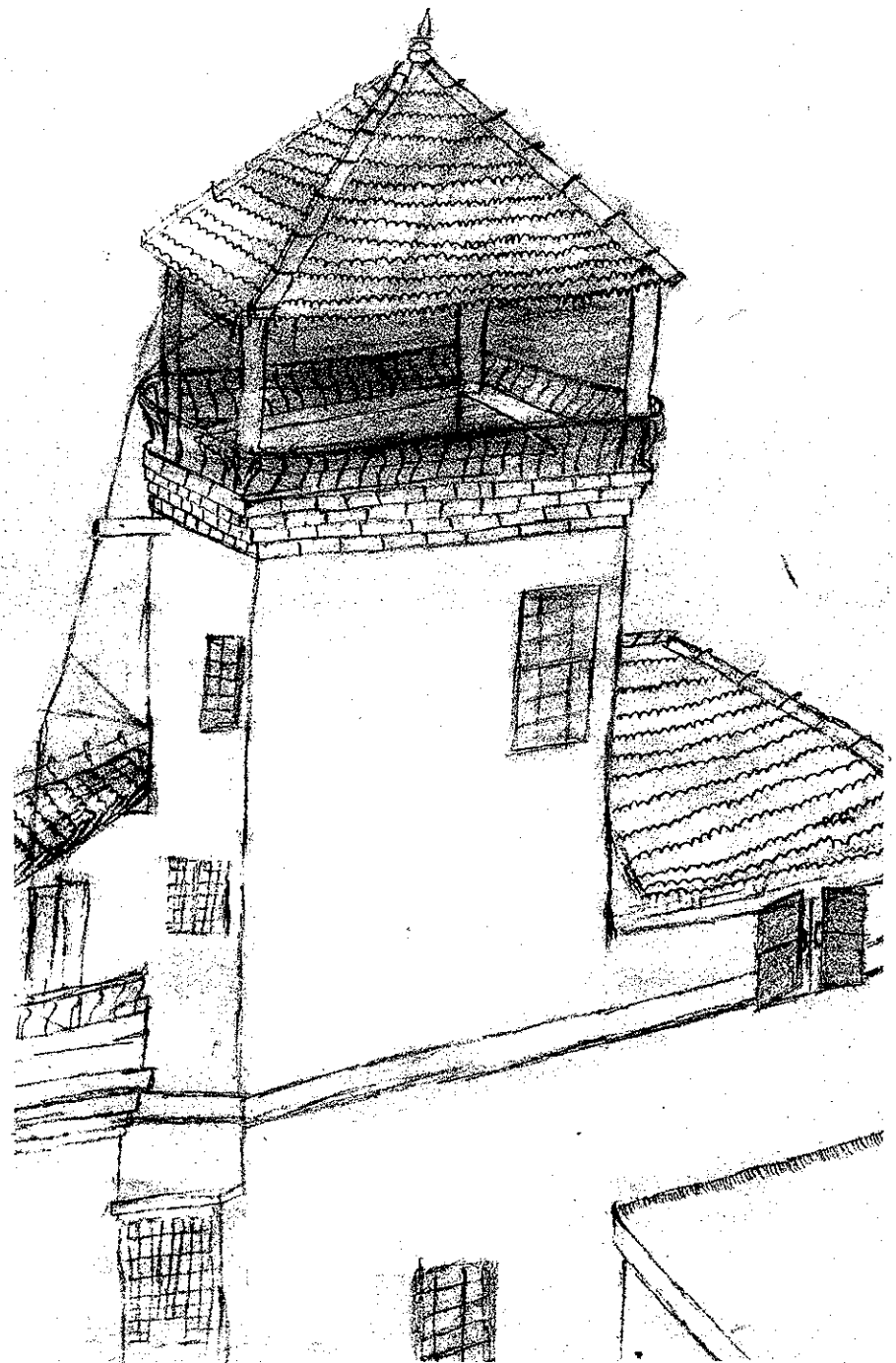
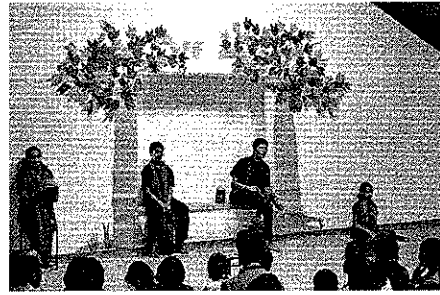
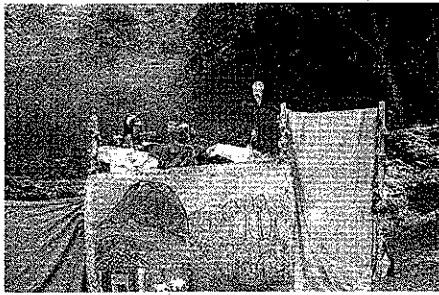
How, then, to start this process? To begin with, what does "place" mean anyway? ("Sense of taste? Sense of waste? Oh, *place*. But what does it *mean*?")

Obviously it means the actual physical landscape that surrounds us: rocks, trees, flowers, buildings, both inside and outside the school. "Sense of place" also includes a sense of the people who create both the place and its meaning. Finally, it means the manner in which we approach the landscape in our minds; in other words, the peculiar psychological attitudes that we bring to the place and to each other.

As you can imagine, this is all great stuff to get into. And we entered it

with gusto. Drawings, statistical surveys, plays, stories, a mammoth book, a nature trail, models, nature observations and journals—all these activities and many more culminated in an eventful *mela* at the end of the term.

Some moments were truly memorable. The Saralas created beautiful and colourful puppets that were very evocative of the village life that surrounds us. The Nature Trail group toiled manfully over many hot

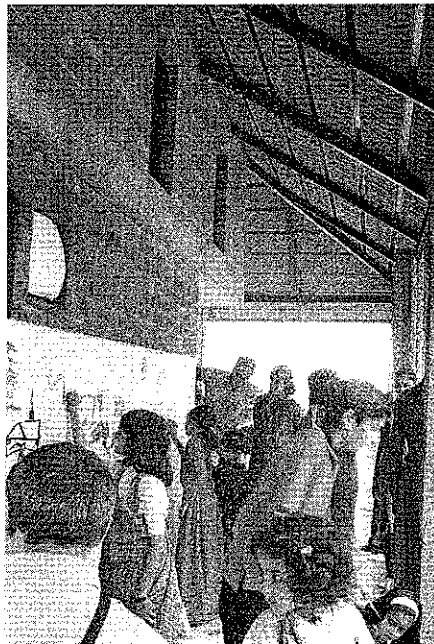


afternoons to clear a pathway that offered a view of interesting specimens. The Giant Book was (almost) as large as the biggest book ever made in publishing history. The Bilvas, in a little play, showed us the folly (and excitement!) of narcissism and self-absorption. The senior drama group extended this theme of human emotion in action. Some of us chose to be animals relating their life-experiences and wisdom. And the rest drew, painted, wrote, observed, sculpted and sawed to record our relationship to the place.

Campus Happenings

The big news on the campus is the Art Room, eagerly awaited for many years. Thanks to a generous donation from Ajay and Jyoti Lavakare, friends and supporters of the school, construction was completed in December 2003 and we had a simple inaugural ceremony early in January 2004. Students and guests sang and chanted, and then everyone painted on a large white sheet of paper put up on the walls of the Art Room. We're sure that this kind of activity is just a taste of things to come.

The other construction news is that the kitchen and maintenance staff now have permanent quarters on campus.



The Land Group, coordinated by Michael, is intensely involved in formulating a long-term vision for land and campus maintenance, as well as taking care of the practical tasks that require immediate attention.

The group is developing a landscape master plan for the CFL campus. A

plan will help guide future decisions for any development be it buildings, new games fields, percolation tanks, agricultural projects or general campus landscaping.

The first step in the design and planning process is to create an existing-conditions site plan. To date, the group

has mapped most of the core of the campus—the buildings, roads, paths and significant trees. The map will be further refined with detailed information about the drainage “nalas” and basins, large boulders, utility lines and significant topographical features.

Once the existing-conditions plan is complete, the group will undertake a site analysis. This analysis involves looking at vegetation, soils, habitat areas, the school's land use and circulation patterns, rainwater harvesting and broader connections to the surrounding village, farmlands and forests.

Some design work has begun, looking primarily at circulation issues. The group has improved the pathways from the hostel areas to the kitchen and dining areas. A series of stone steps and brick landings were built recently in this area which will be finished with landscape plantings. Vehicular access to the lower three hostels is now possible via an improved road that passes by Tarana.



In the first term we watched an exciting *Yakshagana* performance that was put up in our assembly hall by a group from Uppinakudru (in Udupi district) traditionally involved in puppet art. The puppets were brilliantly coloured and very realistic, moving and dancing in an uncannily human manner. The production featured episodes from the *Ramayana*, and culminated in the burning of Lanka—a monkey puppet with a real burning tail!



Comings and Goings

We are very happy to welcome a new set of staff members this year. Keerthi Mukunda and Michael Little (and their son Jalen) have returned to the school. Keerthi is the coordinator of the Bilvas and Michael is involved with various land projects on the campus. Arthi Saktheeswaran is working in the junior school, and in addition she is involved with children who require special attention in English and Math. Chandra is our new helper in the kitchen.

There have been some other changes in the staff profile. Karuna Jain left the school at the end of October. Radhika has been away on a sabbatical and is expected back next year to take charge of the new art room.

Several individuals have volunteered their skills and strengths to enrich the place. Anuradha Natrajan has been working in the kitchen since November. James MacDougall volunteers work on the land and in the library. Stefi Barna is involved with the art programme. Leon, a former student, has been

working hard at several areas over the past year, and his presence is greatly appreciated. Akshay and Athmeya, students from the USA, were here for the best part of the first term working wherever they were needed!

Early in the year, Dr Venkatesh from Bangalore conducted a workshop on the basics of electronics. Avinash, a former student, held an art workshop with the middle school, focusing on perception and image-processing. Aditto Sen spent a week with us in October and engaged the children with craft work and puppet-making. Rajanna, a potter from Jogipalya, spent a week in helping staff and students with their pottery skills, and watching his skill and dexterity was a real treat.

Mr and Mrs Deb, formerly of the Blue Mountain School, visited in July and had some interesting discussions with the staff. Andy Gerber, a Swiss student, spent a whole year with us learning English and various other skills! He left for Switzerland in March 2003. In

January 2004, we had a visit from the senior Oak Grove School students and we enjoyed the interaction.

Finally we must mention the arrival of two babies in the CFL community. Ashok and Kavya's six month old daughter Dyuti is currently learning to crawl. Sangeetha and Satish's son Ishan will turn one soon.

Dragonfly looks as if it's dancing.

Rain comes and it hides.

Amazing eyesight the dragonfly has.

Gliding through the air like a helicopter.

On a warm day it comes out.

No-one can see a dragonfly when it rains.

Flitting after the flies and mosquitoes.

Late in the evening it is still out.

Yellowish orange it looks against the sun.

Kanti Jain, a staff member from January 2000, passed away in August last year. Kanti was actively involved in many areas of campus life. He volunteered to set up the kitchen and set about it with his characteristic enthusiasm. His death was a great shock to all of us.

We were again, later in the year, reminded of the unpredictability of life when we heard that Lakshmi from Varadenahalli village was no more. She was with us for two years, helping in the kitchen and in the hostels.

When the lights go out, the night sky sparkles and looks almost solid, like a block of black ice. A baby cries in one of the hostels; the trucks rumble by on Magadi Road; one by one children drift out of their rooms to talk quietly under the powerful stars, waiting for the lights to return. Words and plans miss the mystery of the moment.

Watch yourself and you will see how you struggle from morning till night, and how your energy is wasted in this struggle. If you merely explain why you struggle, you get lost in explanations and the struggle continues; whereas, if you observe your mind very carefully without giving explanations, if you just let the mind be aware of its own struggle, you will soon find that there comes a state in which there is no struggle at all, but an astonishing watchfulness. In that state of watchfulness there is no sense of the superior and the inferior, there is no big man or little man, there is no guru. All those absurdities are gone because the mind is fully awake; and the mind that is fully awake is joyous.

Krishnamurti, *Reflections on the Self*.

Mailing address:

Centre For Learning,
462, 9th Cross, Jayanagar
1st Block, Bangalore 560011, India.

Campus:

Village Varadenahalli, Magadi Taluk,
Bangalore Rural District 562120

Email: cfl@vsnl.com

Website: <http://www.cfl.edu.org>

Phone: 91+ (0)80-7748048 / 49

Donor Information: CFL is a registered charitable society. Donations to CFL are exempt from income tax in India to the extent provided for under Secn. 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961. If you wish to avail tax exemption in the USA, please email us for details.

Can you help us with our mailing list? If you would like to receive more copies of this newsletter or have friends who would be interested, please write to us.