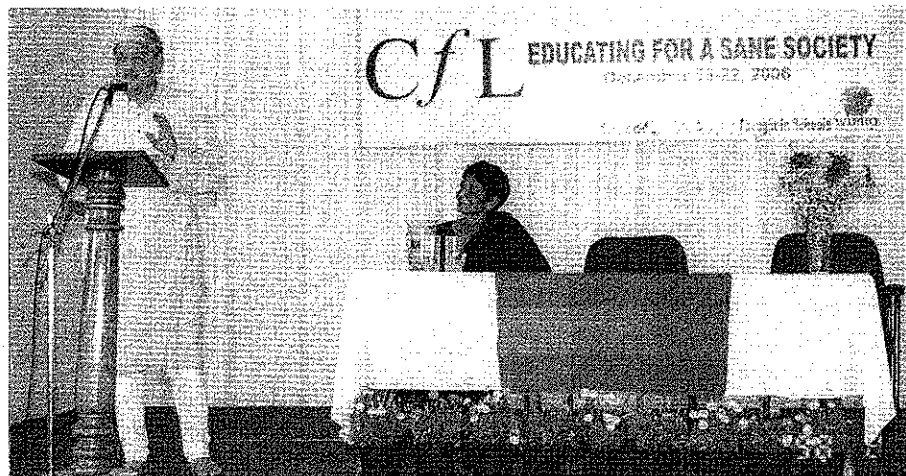


CfL Newsletter

Issue Thirteen
2007



Conference: Educating for a Sane Society

We are happy to share with you a brief account of our December 2006 conference, Educating for a Sane Society.

Our aim was to gather a large number of teachers and educators from all over India (and abroad) in order to dialogue about some crucial areas of concern in education today. These areas included: curricula, dialogue, nature, assessment, school and teacher autonomy, and the emotional well-being of children. We felt that different voices and perspectives, a mix of participants, speaking together would generate a unique, inspirational energy. At the end of the entire process, thanks to the combined efforts of many, both within and outside CFL, we felt our dreams had been realized.

Participants began arriving on Sunday the 17th, and immediately the air was filled with excitement and camaraderie. By the next morning, almost all of the 150 odd participants had arrived and been settled into our campus. The first session began with a

presentation by three staff members on the educational vision and questions of CFL. Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, gave the Inaugural Address (read this on our website). He spoke eloquently on the complexity of 'right' education in today's world: "Schools ... may help students choose – not between right and wrong, truth and untruth, non-violence and violence – that is easy. They must help students learn to choose by self-enquiry between two truths, between two paths both of which may be true in part. That is not easy."

The days followed in quick succession. Although we were disappointed by the unavoidable absence of Prof. Yash Pal, Smt Ahalya Chari and Sr. Cyril, we felt more than recompensed by excellent speakers and discussions over the five days. Prof. Shekhar Seshadri spoke on the Life Skills Curriculum. Jayashree Nambiar opened up questions related to the challenges of 'modern life' and Anjali Noronha addressed the possibilities of dialogue in primary education. Rohit

Dhankar spoke on the National Curriculum Framework 2005: Vision and Perplexities. On the last day, M.C. Malathi and Shirley Joseph shared their life's work at the schools Vikasana and Kanavu, respectively, to an appreciative audience, and Suprabha gave us her thoughts on a growing dichotomy between the city and the forest, mankind and creation. We are grateful to Prof. N Mukunda for agreeing to read Prof. Yash Pal's speech on inclusive education at the conference.

On three days, we made time for small group discussions and hands-on workshops in the afternoons. The discussions worked well for many, not so well for some. Topics like competition, assessment and bigger issues such as 'what are we educating for?' were gone into at some depth.

The workshops were, in a way, the biggest hit! From the feedback we received, all participants enjoyed them immensely and wished that they were much longer. Workshops were on toy making, drama, physical education, art, craft, mathematics, open library, and many others topics. Offering these workshops were many CFL teachers as well as other experts from around India.

One important aspect for us was the fact that several teachers from rural Karnataka government schools attended the conference. In spite of some language and communication difficulties, we felt that the interaction was meaningful and exciting for all.

In a different dimension of learning and interaction, we sang, walked, climbed the neighbourhood hills and danced together in the evenings. Sri Bahauddin Dagar, a noted *dhruwad* artist, gave us an unforgettable concert on the *rudra veena*. These informal sessions added immeasurably to the richness of the five day experience.

Centre For Learning would like to thank all parents, friends and well wishers who helped to make the conference a rich and meaningful experience. Their unstinting support in terms of resources and time made this deep dialogue among educators possible. We are particularly grateful to Wipro Applying Thought In Schools for their support.

Dialogue in Education

(The following is an extract from the text of a workshop on dialogue and children conducted by CFL teachers during the educational conference.)

Each one of us has a certain perception regarding a situation. Clearly, one person's perception and expression may or may not make sense to another. The attempt to communicate and understand others, setting aside our own images, ideas and preconceptions and listening without a barrier, may be termed a dialogue.

The process of dialogue is not merely an external, verbal one. A vital part of dialogue is to observe and understand our own conditioning and the workings of our own minds. Since society and the individual are reflections of each other, it is essential to begin to understand the workings of our own psyche and the patterns of our own emotions if we are to begin to explore social issues and problems. This open ended self enquiry is essential for a dialogue to have real meaning; otherwise, communication becomes simply a matter of trading opinions and ideas without moving together. In the realm of education, dialogue becomes a powerful tool at several levels.

A meaningful dialogue between individuals rests primarily on the conditions under which it takes place. The ability to listen to another person and a recognition of the rights of others to participate are important factors that can affect a dialogue. Even more important are an atmosphere of trust and a lack of fear between individuals. To be meaningful, the atmosphere must be one of critical enquiry that is at the

same time non-judgemental. This necessarily also demands transparency between individuals. Structurally, it requires a non-hierarchical democratic setting that is sceptical of traditional systems of power and authority.

Such a process of enquiry and dialogue can play an immense role in a child's life. Today's world, with its diverse and enormously powerful forces, can easily overwhelm a growing child. Only an open atmosphere based on trust can provide a setting where a young person can not only question rooted beliefs handed down through generations, but can also develop the ability to look inwards and question herself. An openness and freedom to question and express one's perceptions without fear creates room for a healthy relationship to grow between individuals regardless of age or status.

There are many challenges facing an educator who wishes to facilitate dialogue. She needs enormous patience to listen to the emerging viewpoints. She also needs a deep commitment to engage with both questions and personalities. All traditional roles, teacher/student, old/young, mature/immature, need to be abandoned if the dialogue is to proceed in an atmosphere of

affection and trust. The educator must learn the art of holding her perceptions and images of young people lightly and not jumping to conclusions.

Dialogue is a difficult process and can break down for several reasons. Often our emotional responses to situations are so overwhelming that we find it impossible to communicate in a free and open manner. To be able to hold an emotional response lightly and yet engage with a question intelligently is demanding. Remaining wholly engaged with the issue at hand requires tenacity and commitment.

It is important to recognise that dialogue is not a technique to achieve a particular end. We cannot have a dialogue with a motive or with an end result in sight, whether it is correcting student behaviour or promoting a kind of moral education. Dialogue is not about transferring simple messages and codes of conduct. Rather, it holds out the possibility of a profound scepticism that encompasses all aspects of our social and personal lives and that, ultimately, questions our selfhood and private emotions in the strongest manner possible.





General Studies

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the senior students have been engaged with an intense General Studies (GS) programme that incorporates an environmental as well as a social component. We would like to give you a feel of the kinds of issues and themes the students have tackled over the past year.

We would like to thank all the individuals involved with the GS programme, whose combined efforts were instrumental in the learning that took place over the year.

Environmental Studies

The environmental component has had two main intentions. The first has been to foster an awareness of our local environment and an intimacy with the natural world that surrounds us. Students have studied selected aspects of their natural surroundings very closely, have consulted experts in various fields

and have also researched existing material in the topics of their choice. The second intention has been to develop an awareness of global environmental issues through readings and discussions and interactions with experts in the field.

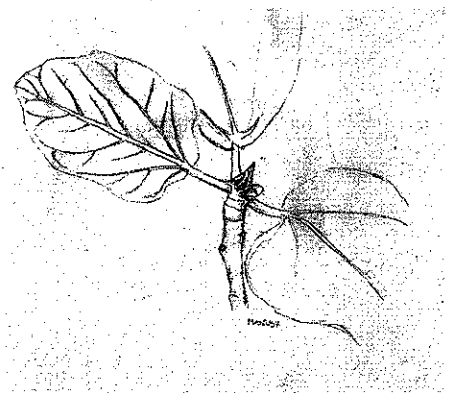
Those involved with the environmental GS, both children and adults, worked mainly in two locations: the CFL campus and the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary (GBS), Wyanaad.

In the first phase of the programme (January to April 2006), students focused on a basic understanding of the taxonomy of trees on our school campus, as well as on bird watching. We also went on many forest walks in the neighbourhood to Savandurga as well as "Bermuda Triangle," the patch of reserve forest near the school. We had the privilege of having Shyamal L, an avid birdwatcher and naturalist from Bangalore, accompany us on our walks. He brought his keen observational skills to bear on our

studies and helped many of us realize how much of our natural world escapes us in the course of everyday life.

The second phase of the programme was conducted at GBS, where the students followed through on several exciting aspects of their studies. They went on walks into the rainforest; the idea behind these was to relate to and understand nature in a different way. Students also took up specific areas and followed them through in detail. These included insect studies, plant and tree studies, reptiles, frogs and birds. Their work was interspersed with sessions of discussions, community work and, of course, lots of swimming in the river.

The third phase of study—June to September 2006—was one of follow-up at the CFL campus. Apart from continuing various aspects of their earlier programmes (forest walks, discussions and so on), the seniors undertook detailed studies of several features on campus. One group undertook to study the waterways and drainage of the campus. Another group decided to study and document wildflowers. Others took up the theme of "unseen animals," the reptiles, mammals and birds that most of us are not usually aware of. Rare plants and trees was another exciting field, as were vegetation mapping and bird life.



In the final term of the year, students and teachers continued the work set in motion in the earlier months. In particular, a lot of energy has gone into documenting current and previous work. The documents include painting, drawings and sketches, field notes, research notes and basic information on particular life forms. We have also been working on a computer database where all the information on the biodiversity of the campus can be recorded and used.

We had the good fortune to interact with Mr Kishore Rithe, a wildlife expert from Maharashtra. The students also took help from Dr Suresh, an expert in the Indian Institute of Science, to identify rare plants. Dr Ravikumar of FRLHT and his colleagues gave a guided educational tour of Savandurga forest and the CFL campus. We discovered to our excitement that our campus is home to some rare and endangered species.

The resource people in the last term have been Diba and Michael.

We are grateful to Mr Anirudh Roy, a student at IISc, for his help with the lizard group and to Mr Prasad, an avid birdwatcher from Bangalore, for spending a whole day with us on our campus.

The Social Component

This module concerned the social environment and focussed on the students learning about lives different from their own. The aim was to connect with people rather than get information from other sources. The first project was on children's rights and was linked to a similar project done by a school in Italy. The students researched the charters of child rights in various countries and compared those from developing and developed countries. This was followed by visits to Chiguru, an organisation devoted to eradication of child labour in the Magadi area. We met children who had been working and are now in the Chiguru hostel and going to school. Next, the students interviewed young people from both

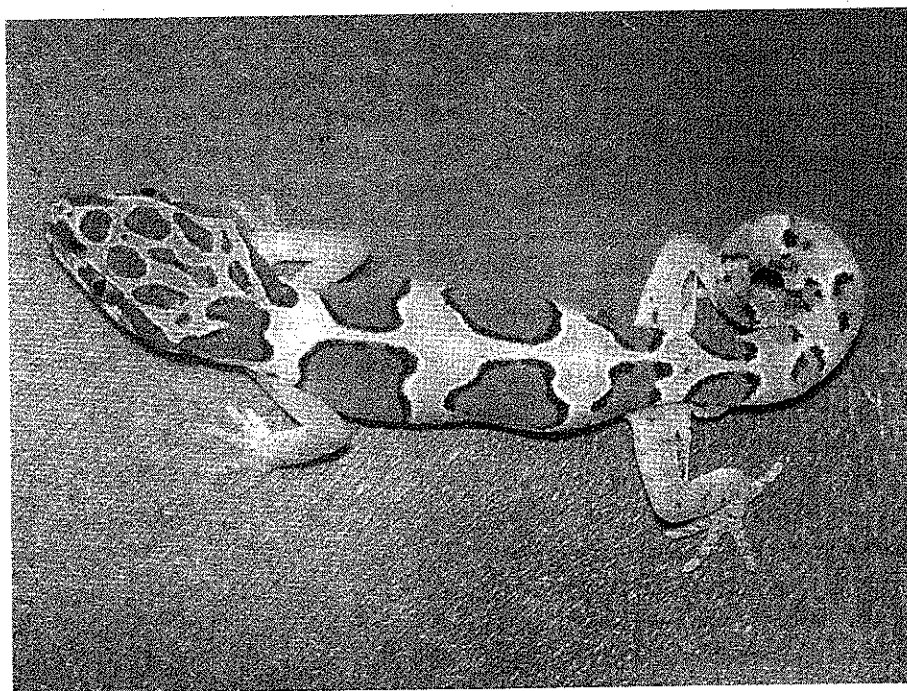
rural and urban backgrounds. The questions covered both their lives and their aspirations. Venu, who took the project to the school in Italy, found that this direct approach gave a more complete picture of what it means to be a child in India.

The other areas of interest to the class were: Hijras/homosexuality, slums, the caste system and religion. To explore these further, we met with a filmmaker and activist and watched a film and had discussions on the Hijra community. This gave some understanding about a group, which is regarded with fear and loathing, particularly by boys.

The group did readings on religion. Over a ten-day period in November-December, we visited slums in Bangalore. The visits were organised by FEDINA, which runs programmes in these areas. The interactions were very intense and left all of us with many questions and impressions. The students have done presentations and written reports on these projects. All the students were completely involved throughout and have been thinking about what they saw and learnt through these projects, though it will be hard to quantify this.

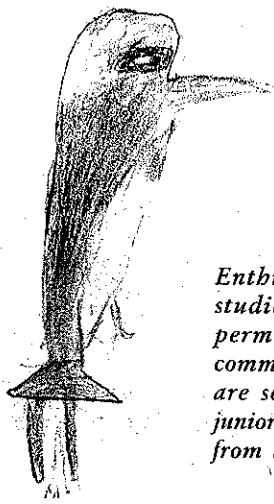
This term, the entire group has been visiting the primary school in the neighbouring village of Shanbhoganahalli and introduced English to them through activities.

The GS programme over the past year has been an extremely meaningful one, plunging us all, adults and children alike, into difficult questions and issues regarding society, nature and the process of living itself. It has been both instructive and a pleasure to watch the enthusiasm and energy that have taken hold of our community with regard to these issues.



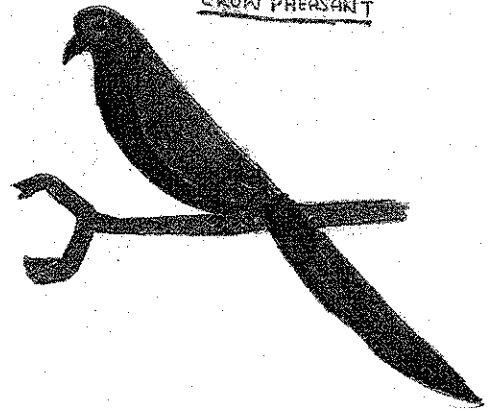
Small Green Bee-Eater

The small green bee-eater is green and has two stick like tails. The small green bee eater has a shade of brownish orange under its wing. The beak is curved and around 3 cm long. The tail is around 6 cm long.

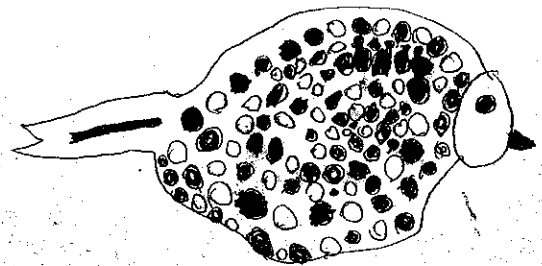


Enthusiasm for nature studies has always permeated the entire community. On this page are some samples of the juniors' notes and sketches from the past year.

CROW PHEASANT



spotted Cuckoo



Events

Walk to school

A cow, garlanded with a string of marigold and taking shelter under a huge old peepul tree, gazes curiously at us as we walk by. Three bee-eaters, precisely perched on an electric cable, calmly look down upon us for a while before suddenly swooping off together into the green distance.

The day is mercifully cool and windy. Dark clouds cover the sky and the smell of rain is tantalizing in the air. Occasionally the sun breaks through, palely gleaming, and we pause and look up and wipe the

sweat and dust off our faces. Just another 20 kilometers to go.

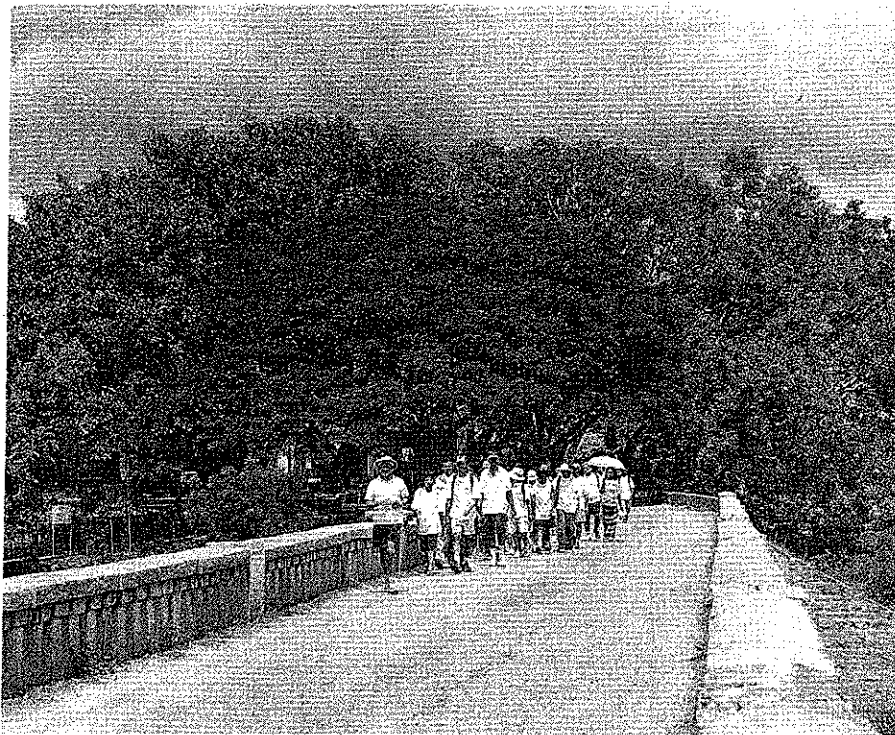
What are a group of children [aged between 6 and 18], accompanied by their teachers, parents and other friends, doing walking along Magadi Road towards their school in Varadenahalli village 35 kilometers away? They certainly look a curious group—about 150 people clad in white t shirts, walking steadily along the road. *The bus stop is just ahead, suggests one friendly man. Why not take a bus?* Another, a lady, is sympathetic. *Poor things, they are already so thin. Must they walk so long?*

The students and adults of CFL are walking to school for several

reasons. One main reason is to raise money for solar energy in the school.

Solar energy, which traps energy from the sun, is evidently not a perfect technology. But we feel that it is important to raise awareness about solar energy and improve the technology so that in the future, more and more people may choose solar. This is one of the main reasons for the long walk to school.

Another reason for walking is to remind ourselves of the long distances that children all over India walk simply in order to get to school. Whether in the hot and dusty plains of Tamil Nadu or in the lush



cool mountains of the north, thousands of courageous and curious minds are going to a lot of trouble in order to be educated. Our day of walking is a way of reminding ourselves of their spirit.

We arrive at the school, knees, ankles and shins hurting. A dog has followed us over the entire walk, and his friendliness is like a balm. What a change, from our fresh and energetic early morning stretching session with Anju and Bobby George, who came to give us encouragement, to the stiff and tired evening stretches! But our dusty faces are covered with smiles – we've each pushed ourselves physically, and now it's time for a well deserved rest.

25% of the money CFL raised from the 'Walk to School' has gone to helping the village schools of Varadenahalli.

Trips and Camps

In the first term, the Tamalas and Palashas (10 to 12 year olds) visited the Deenabandu Trust, a remarkable organization that is both a home for poor and destitute children

as well as a coeducational school, in Chamrajnagar (*en route* to Mysore). The purpose of their three-day visit was, as in most of our excursions, to have a window into and participate in the lives of individuals from very different backgrounds.

The children spent time in the school, taught the students simple toy making and decoration, cooked a meal, sang songs and formed many personal friendships. They (and the adults who accompanied them) were touched by the cheerful responsiveness of their young hosts, and the readiness with which they took care of the place and of each other. It is certainly an organization with which we would like to have a long and close association.



Those of you who are fans of Google Earth and who enjoy scrolling over the beautiful oceans, lakes and mountains of our planet might like to check out the CFL campus on the software sometime. Follow the twists and turns of

Magadi Road past the bleak brown wastes of outer Bangalore; suddenly you will hit fields, green and red, plotted and pieced and quietly precise; if you are patient you will eventually come upon the distinctive pattern of the T G Halli dam, water contained in a claw-like figure, gleaming dark blue and white in some impossible sunshine; and finally you are there, the library tower decisively pointing towards the sky, the thatched and tiled roofs plainly visible, as are the fields all around.

What Google Earth misses, however, is a faint twist of smoke arising from a wood fire in one particular field to the north of the school. If the software allowed it, and if the satellite that took the pictures was indeed gliding through the sky that morning, you might zoom in on that particular field and catch a glimpse of several children (and two adults) clustered around the fire, cooking a late morning meal of *khichidi* or the more prosaic *avalakki*. There is ash flying in their eyes and in the food; they will eat the meal out of leaf-plates left to dry in the sun from yesterday; they will swear it is absolutely delicious.

The Palashas (12-13 year olds) and their coordinators spent two weeks in a field neighbouring the school. However, they did not have any contact with the school; they cooked their own food, dug their own soak pits, did trigonometry using twigs and branches; slept in tents or (weather permitting) under the open sky; wrote in their journals every day; made beautiful sketches of the rocks and hills all around; watched the stars, planets and the moon, washed clothes, heaved rocks, read stories and generally had a lot of fun away from the civilising forces of society in general and CFL in particular!

The project grew out of the idea of finding a right balance for the day (without a rigid structure or timetable), and their day was very leisurely. The idea was to wake up each morning and figure out what needed to be done for the day to be smooth and balanced. There was also the demand of hard physical work, necessary for the daily maintenance of the living space, as well as experimenting with an extremely simple lifestyle.

The learning and challenges were, of course, tremendous. The necessity to cooperate, to look out for everyone and not just oneself, was one big challenge that the children quickly adapted to. There was also the skill of responding quickly to challenges that the environment posed, whether it was heavy rain and a leaky tent or a soak pit that had filled quicker than foreseen! As one child commented, it was a bit like being a goldfish that has suddenly been released in the Great Barrier Reef after spending most of its life in a bowl—an arresting and (simultaneously) liberating comparison!

With the help of Nomito and Swami, parents of the school, the Ketaki and Parijata groups went on a rock climbing camp in Ramnagaram. The purpose of the trip was to enable the students to acquire the basic techniques of rock climbing: the basic holds, the knots, the techniques of rappelling and chimneying, and the somewhat ominously labelled *dead man's crawl*, which involves tying ropes around two trees across a river and crawling over. On their return to school, the students gave an impressive demonstration of the skills they had acquired, using the rocks and buildings on campus.

The camp emphasized the importance of paying attention to various aspects of the different techniques as well as trust in team spirit. All who went on the camp discovered that each individual has his or her own unique strengths and weaknesses while climbing. There was no one formula in responding to a tough situation; rather, each one had to establish their own distinctive manner of dealing with challenges.

A feature of the past year has been the weekly hikes that senior students have done, exploring the neighbourhood. These hikes have added to our overall knowledge of our immediate environment and have also fed into the General Studies programme.

The senior students (Mallikas and Champakas) went on a Himalayan trek this summer to the Kumaon range and the Panchachuli glacier. They encountered snow, altitude sickness, mules in their lodgings, lost

companions and other tremendous adventures. It was a challenging and enriching experience for all of them.

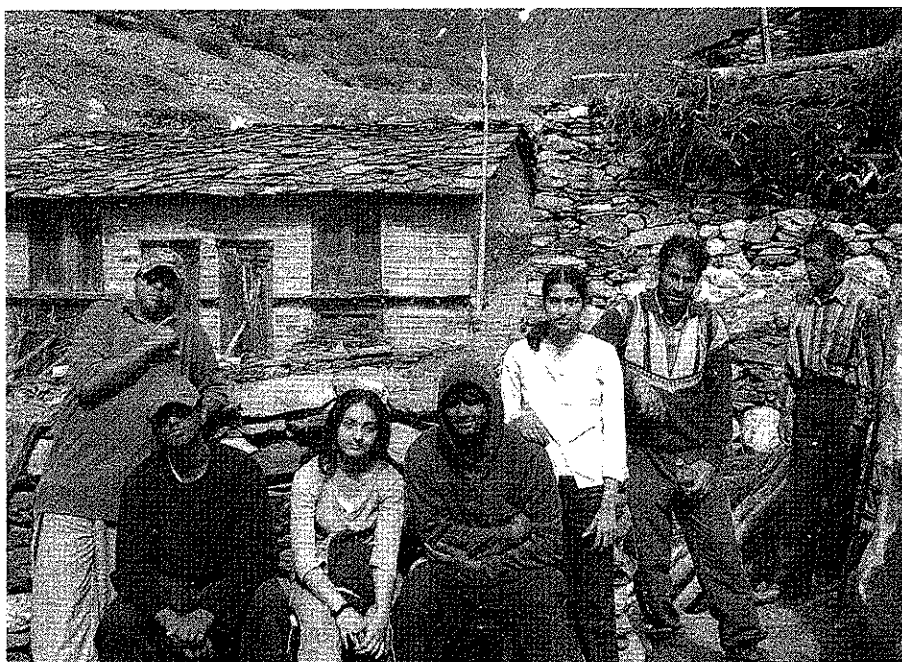
People and Campus

Kiran Kumar was with us for the past year, working in the kitchen and with physical fitness, specifically *kalari*. He has returned to Chennai, and we will miss his artistic and athletic prowess in martial arts as well as his presence in the kitchen.

Rooi Colchester, a senior student from Brockwood Park, was with us for a period of six months. He was a part of the senior school and was also on campus right through the week, enjoying the quiet of the weekends! He has returned to Brockwood to continue his studies.

Nishwath Hasan has been volunteering in school since the third term of the last academic year; her areas of interest include art, craft and the junior and middle school.

Manjunath, after spending a year working with various aspects of the school, including accounting and sports, will be moving on to other activities in the field of education. We wish him all the best in his endeavours.



Imogen Sahi has been working with the senior biology students over the past year. We would like to thank her for her time and support.

As usual, many parents have been volunteering in various vital areas in the school and we appreciate the time and energy they have given to the place.

We would like to thank **Ms Karunavati** and **Ms Kusumalata** from Sri Lanka who conducted a two day workshop on craft and the uses of coconut material. Children

and adults benefited tremendously from the interaction.

Santosh, a staff member from Kanavu, worked hard with children in the first term on their kalari skills. We appreciate his contribution to our physical education programme.

As always, it was a pleasure to have **Gerard Bayle** on campus in the early part of this year, working on drama skills and activities.



The third phase of construction on campus is now complete, and the

campus has three additional buildings. A middle school building gives a stable base, in terms of class space and resources, for children emerging from the junior school. We now have a guest house that offers simple and comfortable accommodation away from the hustle and bustle of hostel life! We also have a new office space beside the kitchen.

The first and second standard children from the Varadenahalli village school have worked this past year with Lalitha and the Parijatas on art and craft. We have enjoyed their presence on the campus, as always.

Centre for Learning is looking for committed individuals who feel that education is the key to the regeneration of self and society.

We are looking for people interested in working in the following areas:

Senior school: mathematics, science and social science

Nature programmes and campus development

Sport

Kitchen management

Interested applicants must be open to performing a wide range of tasks in the running of the school, including (apart from teaching) pastoral care. They would ideally be committed to living on our campus and enriching the life of the school and community.

Contact details:

Please send a brief résumé and a detailed statement of purpose describing why you would like to work with us to our mailing address (see below):

or as an e-mail attachment (sub: Teacher Application) to info@cfl.in



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