Issue 17 2011

CFL NEWSLETTER

Academia, non-academia

A distinction many people draw in the field of learning is between "academic" and "non-academic" pursuits. In our past brochures and publications, we too have made such a distinction. It seems to be based on a simple classification scheme: subjects (such as history, math, language and science) are academic, and extra-curricular activities (such as carpentry, pottery, music and art) are non-academic. Following from this are some interesting frameworks: academic means verbal, linear, intellectual, rational and analytical, whereas non-academic pursuits are non-verbal, lateral, creative and spontaneous, allowing for emotional expression. These distinctions are often justified as the "left brain right brain divide".

Why the need for this division? The sense of concern around this question comes at various times from various quarters. For example, some students obviously face more difficulty than others in reading texts, listening in class, solving problems, answering questions and analyzing complex arguments. Educators and parents may feel that traditional 'academic' curricula burden such students unfairly. There must be alternatives such as art, music or sport which allow them opportunities for enjoyment and excellence.

Another educational imperative is to come upon some true proportion or a balance that schools must achieve between a variety of experiences and activities. Maybe it is a balance between the hands, the head and the heart. Or a balance among the 'multiple intelligences'. Certainly it's fair to say that there is an imbalance in mainstream schooling today: too much desk-bound, text-based, paper-and-pen work, sharpening only a narrow skill set.

A slightly different concern is not on behalf of the child so much as a questioning of social order in the realm of work and the economy. This argument goes: education merely feeds current power structures such as capitalism, the military and the state. There is also an equation between intellectual school-based ability and status and power in society. So tilting toward 'nonacademic' subjects is a form of activism that redresses this imbalance.

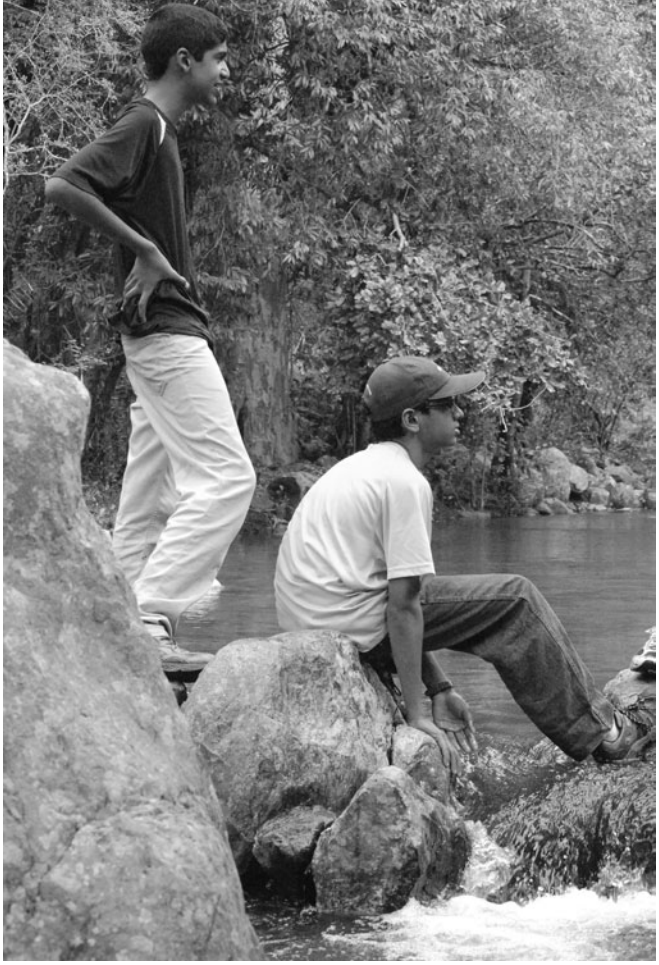
Obviously these points are important and true. But from here to the polarization between academic and nonacademic, and their respective characterizations, is a jump, and one we are uncomfortable with. Without deeper examination, we end up wrangling over how many periods we have for academic versus nonacademic pursuits in the timetable, and this is a no-win situation. It is a distinction that certainly bears more careful scrutiny, and so this year we began to try looking at it from different angles. In this article, we will share the questions that came up among us, and develop on them a little.

Physics and pottery, it seems, could not be more different from each other. At least in the popular perception, one is abstract, intellectual, text-based and formula-filled. The other is relaxed, hands-on, and develops an aesthetic sensibility. But pottery as a serious pursuit also requires abstraction, conceptualization, a considerable knowledge and experience base, an experimental approach, planning and execution. A skilled potter is enriched by an understanding of the history, human practices and culture surrounding her craft. Meanwhile, learning school level physics well demands an experimental, hands-on approach, observation of natural phenomena such as light and sound and making intuitive connections between concepts, theory and practice. At an older age formulae and abstract explanations will come in, and none of this learning is possible without creative leaps and insights.

In these descriptions, nowhere is it implied that physics should be dull, dry and desk-bound. Nor that pottery will be a source of continual joy and creation. Drill and repetition are a crucial part of excellence in any learning process. And, in any case, it is difficult to compare the creative process involved in making a pot and solving a problem in physics, and to say that one kind of creativity is superior to the other.

Here we should share what, in our conception, is possible in an 'academic' class. A typical classroom scenario at CFL, for example, involves plenty of conversing and discussion around every point of learning: pauses, listening, rumination, sharing and re-telling. Particularly up to age 14 but even beyond, children explore outside the walls of their classroom, work with objects, and in pairs or small groups. Analytical thinking at any age, far from being dry and unemotional, is intense, heated, active, inclusive, exciting. There is nothing 'merely' verbal about it! When an academic class is approached in this way, the polarizations with which we began this article lose their power. Any child, even one who has difficulties with typical 'schoolwork', can enjoy the participative processes of learning concepts in different subject areas.

Apart from enjoyment, do we feel that in some sense children need to engage with analytical thinking? The emphasis on analysis is important as a life skill in understanding society, human impulses and livelihood. We want our students to be intel-



ligent people with the capacity to sift through the various social meanings being thrown at them, and to recognize the limited nature of all ideology. This takes deep discernment, which can be taught and honed in a vibrant, skeptical classroom environment. We'd just like to add a caution, however. Critical thinking for its own sake can lead to judgment and a sense of division or superiority. A very smart person can take delight in tearing apart other people's arguments, mocking their folly. But this is not how we would like to characterize intelligence. A discriminatory capacity should be leavened with humility and empathy. Thus, at CFL, academics, in the sense of abstract and analytical thinking, is not about being that clever kid in the front row whose hand is always in the air. It is as much about listening to others, being patient, and realizing that the quickest thinker does not always give us the most interesting insights. Time and again this has been true in CFL classrooms.

What about the concern that education has become little more than a feeder into prevailing ideology? One message we convey to our students is that meaning in work comes perhaps from questioning ideology rather than accepting it. As a consequence of this emphasis, our students may and do choose interesting careers in life. However, we as a school cannot hold certain career choices over others as our aim: that would be dangerous and narrow-minded. If as a school we endeavored to produce mainly artists, potters or carpenters, would we be fundamentally addressing the situation? In trying to compensate for a perceived imbalance in society, we cannot swing into a different imbalance in our curriculum. But the point remains that mathematics and the languages occupy a privileged place in our education right through the child's school years.

Realistically, the resources (teacher skill sets, time) of a school will determine the day to day curriculum. Hundreds of school must be facing and solving this issue in their own ways. Every educational system settles on a solution for how to divide time, one aspect of which is the academic-nonacademic distinction. This can cause no end of angst to educators! But finally, there may not be a correlation between the way the timetable was divided in school and what our students end up doing. We cannot be sure, say, that even the large proportion of our students who take up environmental work do so as a result of our curricular emphases. When we recently created a rough demographic chart of our alumni's occupations, artists and designers formed the majority, even though a casual look at our timetable would not have suggested this! So we like to think that what the students have gained is the ability to critically assess their own strengths and interests, and follow them through with courage.

Finally we remind ourselves that it is the same human brain approaching these various fields of learning. Does the emphasis on hands-on activities, or analytic reasoning, make for a better human being or a better society? This has not been shown to be the case either way. There are many interesting educational systems already in place in pockets of India and abroad, with widely differing curricular emphases, yet the basic challenge of learning about self-interest remains. This is not to sweep careful thought about curricula under the carpet; it is to remind ourselves that the scope of the problem is not touched by our tinkering with the timetable!

Campus happenings

In January, the fourth and fifth standard students of the village government primary school began a small project with us on the history of Varadenahalli, through interviews with elderly family members and visits to old temples, wells and tanks. We screened Deepa Dhanraj's 'Young Historians' series for them. The students built a picture of life in the village around 25 years ago, as remembered and told by Raja, one of our staff who has lived in Varadenahalli since boyhood. Quite a bit has changed: brick homes in place of mud and grass ones, bore wells and tanks in place of wells, television in place of playing in the streets, dry land in place of bogs and streams, new crops (such as lentils) and greater yields of old crops (such as *ragi*). The students put up a small play depicting life in those days, which was watched by all of CFL. Script consultant: Raja!

Our library has been, for the last few years, functioning without a full time librarian. This is a situation that at one time could not have been dreamed of at CFL! However, we have managed to put together a small committee, each member bringing his or her own valuable skills, which covers all aspects of need and growth in the library. Thanks to the culture of the open and inclusive library built up over so many years, teachers and students still have the right instincts in relation to it! So the new arrangement has worked to everyone's satisfaction. But there is always scope for improvement, new ideas, and of course, book repairs. Usha and Karuna (an ex-student who is now working in a library herself) stationed themselves in school for several days, taking on urgent and interesting library tasks. Some examples: a separate selection for the in-between reader (neither middle nor senior school), classifying all our maps and giving new visibility to non-fiction books. Nikita and Maitreyi, former students, came and showed us how book repair is done: lovingly and with a large dose of optimism regarding how long the book will last. Every single student in school participated in one or another activity.

Senior student Sandeep took on a project to create a reed-bed grey water treatment system at school. He worked on it (assisted by a small crew) for over six months. Grey water from the kitchen flows into a collection tank, overflowing into a jelly bed. From here, the water flows into a large reed bed. Treated water percolates out into the banana patch below. We are yet to test this system with the water flow from the fully functional kitchen. We will monitor the quality and quantity of treated water over the coming year in order to decide how best to use it. Thank you to Good Earth for financially supporting this project.

The students of the graduating class of 2011 each spent ten to fifteen days on campus, helping out in many crucial areas. Our thanks to them; we wish them all the very best.

The Senior School General Studies programme over the first term was on a study of lakes. The students took up various themes around the topic: the ecology of lakes, for example, or the socio-economic impact of lakes in the current urban landscape. They visited various lakes in the city and studied these themes, interacting with people who lived around the area. It was a rich and fulfilling study, and we realised that the topic was far more complex than we had envisioned. Our thanks to Rohan D'Souza, H S Sudheera and M B Krishna for their valuable inputs.

Over the course of the past year, teachers and parents met intensively together to discuss the finances of the school, to come up with new ideas and to listen to new voices. Do visit our website to read a description of the process.

Birthday Celebrations

2010 was the year we celebrated twenty years of existence. CFL began in August 1990, so accordingly in August last year we planned a weekend birthday party for ourselves. We tried to get in touch with all alumni and also their parents, inviting them to join us for a day of fun and food. It was wonderful to reconnect with those who came, including some parents we had not met in years. As it turned out, there was at least one representative student from every single batch passing out since 1994! Current students and teachers had put together a collection of mini-presentations, which were riotous in themselves, but the ex-students stole the show with their skit, prepared hurriedly only the previous night. They staged an entire school assembly, complete with announcements, songs and eccentric behaviour; most striking was how much like today's school assemblies it all was. Many of the newer students, who have never known these long-lost alumni, looked at them in puzzlement: wait a minute, how do *they* know what our school is like?

The day before that, we hosted a lunch for the residents of Varadenahalli village, who have been our kind and forbearing neighbours for over ten years. When we first moved here bag and baggage in February 2000, we were unacquainted with more than a few village residents. Even today, it would be wrong to make any claims about our relationship with the roughly 100 homes that make up Varadenahalli, not to mention the social dynamics and forces that bind them together. However, there is no question that we have benefited from being here, in immeasurable ways. The people have given us their affection and trust, and from the start we have felt safe on campus and in the neighbourhood. Once in a while a visitor asks us how we manage "security issues". Our fence is unmanned and hardly a serious deterrent to any purposeful intruders. But long ago, when the campus was still a set of drawings on paper, we were advised that the best fences are the relationships one forges with neighbours. This has been amply borne out in the last ten years, and we hope the situation continues.

Comings and Goings

Rohan D'Souza has joined us this year, and he will be working with many age groups on Hindi and sports. Sandy and Sruti from GBS will be spending some months on campus, working on the land and with middle-schoolers. Maitreyi has also joined us this year; she will mainly be teaching middle school children Math, English and Kannada. Rina D'Souza has decided to move on to education related NGO work. In her three years here, she forged many affectionate relationships with children and adults alike, and she will be missed. Gowdappa and Ramlinga, for many years part of our campus, have left to return to their homes. They too will be missed.

Teachers from the Episcopal School of Acadiana in Louisiana in the US initiated an art exchange programme with our students. They visited CFL in March, bearing useful gifts, and carried away samples of children's art work for display in their local museum.

Wipro Applying Thought In Schools held their three-day Forum meeting, on the topic of history, at our campus.

Several parents committed their time and energy to the school on a regular basis. Some gave a whole day every week; others helped out either in the kitchen, or in the classroom or with pastoral care. We thank them all.

Magic Mela

A girl spreads her hands apart, and an orange-coloured plastic ball dances in the empty space between them. A child cuts open a twisted loop of paper, and instead of two loops, he finds a single large loop! A group of children try to understand and explain why lines painted on a chart seem curved, but are actually parallel. . .

Over two glorious terms (almost twenty-five weeks, for three to four hours a week), the whole school worked hard on magic as part of this year's *mela*. Not magic of the Harry Potter variety, or the magic of sorcerers and wizards! No, we explored the infinitely subtle, maddening, teasing world of counter-intuitive phenomena and seemingly impossible feats: visual illusions, scientific paradoxes, sleight of hand. Oh, and we constructed many wooden boxes. And cut up reams and reams of paper. And shuffled decks of cards until our fingers were numb. We mixed chemicals, twisted wires, spun coins, tried to cut each other in half, made shadow puppets… All exhilarating stuff!

Why magic as a theme? First reason: it is pure fun, and all, young and old, get hooked on to tricks and illusions. Second reason: there is a lot of hands-on practice and preparation involved at various levels, and again, people of all ages can plunge in. Thirdly: as a theme, it has a lot of conceptual and abstract depth, and the more you explore, the more the field opens up. We could explore magic as science, magic as perception and illusion, magic as history, magic as theatrics. These criteria actually inform all of our *mela* themes choices.

What did we do, actually?

The juniors studied a bewildering range of phenomena and activities. They played with the mysterious Mobius strip, which is a strip of paper which seems to have only one side. They made the colours of ribbons change in front of your eyes, and balanced forks and nails in impossible ways. Money slipped into a magic box they made simply vanished. Can you make a brick rise by using just an ordinary milk packet and a straw? They can!

The ten and eleven year olds (Tamalas and Ashwathas) worked on illusions and perception. Why do simple objects (tables, apples) retain their colour and shape even though we move around them and the light falling on them changes? When we stare at a rotating spiral and then look at a friend's face, why does her face seem to swell in and out? What is persistence of vision? The children made models and demonstrations that explained these subtle concepts in psychology and brain functioning. Some of them also painted patterns on walls and other surfaces; from a single "Magic Point," these broken fragments of paintings miraculously formed into coherent images.

The twelve and thirteen year old children (Palashas and Akshas) worked on constructing magical toys and gears involving carpentry and simple electronics. But they soon graduated to perfecting card tricks, and for months you could not walk around campus without someone asking you to 'pick a card'. The fourteen year olds (Ketakis) planned and executed various

magical demonstrations involving the properties of light; some children studied the history of magic and famous magicians. All three groups worked on scripting and performing a play: *The Witches*, by Roald Dahl.

The seniors mainly studied scientific phenomena and mathematics. They worked on the mysterious properties of the Mobius strip (the juniors had worked on this too!) They also explored cyclical chemical reactions: a solution regularly changes colour in a repeating cycle. A third topic was iridescence, the shifting changing colours seen, for example, on soap bubbles and on the wings and shells of some insects. Other topics included the concept of infinity and paradoxes in game theory.

Apart from these projects, the whole school split into vertical groups of four students each, to explore what is called 'stage magic'. Each group had to come up with a 3 – 4 minute trick or illusion they could present to a large audience. The steps in this preparation were quite involved and complex, and adult input was zero to minimal. First, the children had to conceptualize the trick. Then they had to plan the props that would make the trick possible (how to cut a classmate in half? Shall we use two tables that appear to be one, and move them apart slightly? Or a cardboard box that has a false compartment? Wooden or cardboard?) Next, they had to come up with a routine to present the trick, like a play. Finally, the costumes and music. Quite an elaborate performance!

When the day of the *mela* presentation arrived, each group performed their trick to a large and appreciative audience. This whole performance was followed by the play *The Witches*, a riotous act involving boys acting as women turning into mice!

Many resource people—too numerous to mention individually—gave us a lot of support for this *mela*. We would like to thank two special individuals who gave us tremendous help and encouragement. Gerard Bayle has been a regular visitor for many years now, and indeed is a part of our calendar! He was on campus for three weeks, and he helped us get our trick presentations stage ready and gave plenty of support in other ways. Ashok Rupner, from IUCAA, Pune, spent a few days with us and shared many insights and processes regarding science, toys and magic. We would also like to thank Vishnu, a young magician from Bangalore, who spent a day with us. He presented a whole set of tricks, and also interacted with many groups. And thank you to the invisible donor, Shashidhara, who kindly sent us many square feet of plywood with which to create our props.

Excursion profile

What makes a good excursion? Here are some ingredients which seem necessary. A fit and healthy, cooperative (but not submissive!) group of students, adults who can work together and relate with students in a relaxed manner, and experiences which are challenging and yet not sapping of one's energy and spirit. If the food is nutritious and sumptuous and the weather gods smile on these travellers, then it becomes a superb trip.

Here are two brief profiles of our high school and senior school excursions.

High school:

Rigging up LED torches, embroidering, sharing songs, playing volleyball, crafting bamboo table lamps, torches and toys. Swimming in streams, creating paper jewellery, working on the land, visiting a tribal hospital and topping it all off with treks through parts of the Western Ghats. Intersperse this with conversations, formal and informal, on the impact of tourism, the role of wildlife and humans in sharing natural landscapes, and you have the Ketaki-Parijatha excursion in December 2010.

This two week trip of diverse experiences began at the house of Sundar and Sonati, a couple who live in Thekambattu, Tamil Nadu, and home-school their two sons. We interacted with them for a day, enjoying their delicious cooking and being entertained by a shadow puppet play performed by the whole family.

Bidding goodbye, we began an arduous seven hour trek carrying our backpacks into the Sittilingi Valley. Sittilingi, an Adivasi village, is where Anuradha and Krishna have established Thulir, an after-school centre for young children and a vocational training centre for youth.

The next six days were spent interacting with young people from the surrounding villages who come to Thulir for vocational training. This presented an opportunity for the CFL group to learn a range of new hands-on skills. In exchange, the CFL children shared their songs, art and craft skills. A visit to the now well established Tribal Health Initiative hospital founded by Drs Regi and Lalitha was an inspiring experience. Initial doubts of some of the adults as to whether the differences between city and rural teenagers would hamper their interaction quickly melted away as the children wanted to spend time, swim and play volleyball together. Towards the end of stay there was a genuine reluctance to part ways.

Following a brief touristy stop at St. Mary's Island, we headed into Kudremukh national park. This final leg of the journey was both an introduction to and an immersion into the immense natural wealth of the Western Ghats. Vanamitra, a group that works extensively on wildlife conservation in this region, organised a series of valuable experiences for our three day stint. During this time we witnessed the stark contrasts between the area's natural beauty on the one hand and the detrimental effects of modern human activity on the other. Treks to places like Kurinjal Peak offered us a pristine environment largely unmarked by signs of human contact. A nearby waterfall littered with garbage unfortunately served as a reminder of unmindful tourism. A visit to the Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation Limited's (KIOCL) mine site and the Lakya tailings dam clearly illustrated the impact of the demands of modern lifestyles on the natural environment.

On reflection, the trip served as a window into other ways of living and hopefully raised some questions in all of us about the way we lead our lives. Of course we all eagerly awaited a hot bath and home-cooked food on our return to Bangalore!

Senior school:

Thanks to Sunita Rao of Vanastree, students from our seniormost class, the Sevantikas, were fortunate to have a wonderful excursion during their December 2010 trip to the Malnad region in Karnataka. The group experienced a variety of landscapes: a coastal trek along the Arabian sea, crossing fishing villages and mountain ridges from the outer fringes of the Western Ghats, and ending up in coves enclosed by low mountains on either side and the sea in front. Swimming partners in the sea included dolphins. There were day treks in the forests of the

Malnad river, mostly in the water shed of the river Gangavalli. One trek stands out: a day-long hike along the river with no banks at all! This meant crawling along the rocky slippery edges of the river, which culminated in a stupendous waterfall with a lovely pool at its base to swim in.

The students and teachers also spent four days in people's homes in Karkoli village. We lived with a family, partaking of all their activities, and got an intimate feel of the lives of people who come from a very different cultural and socio-economic background than their own. The warmth, hospitality and affection we received were overwhelming. Over the two weeks, we met a diverse set of people: women of the Hallakki tribe, members of the Siddhi community and Havyak Brahmins, to name a few. We encountered social and environmental issues impacting the region and interacted with committed individuals attempting to address these issues.

The trip culminated in a boat ride early in the morning on the Gangavalli with the rising sun warming our backs. Students sang in their lovely voices, keeping beat with the rowing boat and lapping waves, and tasted how fresh water turns salty as we approached the Arabian Sea, where the trip had begun.

Our Holy Timetable

In our celebrated flat structure, our wonderful non-hierarchical school, there lurks a tyrant. This autocrat's whims dictate our work day in every detail, from wake-up time to goodnight, and teachers and students alike are quite helpless in its grip. It is clearly in charge around here, and sometimes, I feel, delights in its sense of power over us. For example, it will fill your Monday with a double period of physics followed by a double period of chemistry followed by three math periods in the afternoon. But then on Tuesday, in remorse, it will give you a morning of art and the afternoon off.

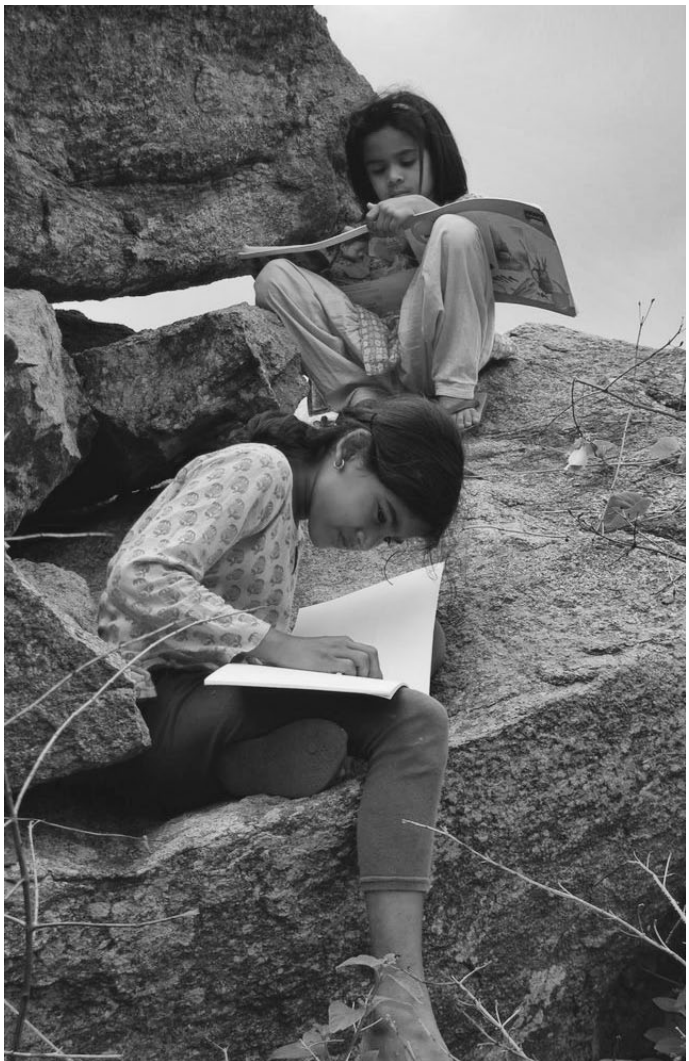
I'm referring to the CFL timetable, that deceptively mild-looking sheet of paper with a 15x17x40 penciled matrix on it that hangs in the kitchen. Every so often, someone will go up to it hopefully, and return dejected. Who needs a headmaster when you have a timetable?

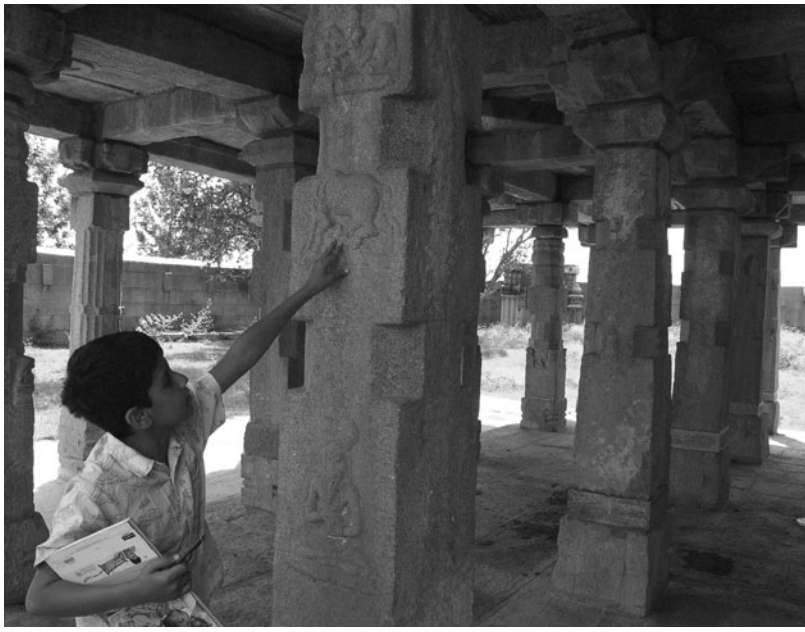
The CFL timetable has an interesting history. As I recall, it used to be a far simpler affair in the mid 1990s. After all the teachers had decided what they wanted to do in the coming year and with which students, we would pull out sheets of paper and pens, expertly draw ourselves a grid, and proceed to fill

it in. Somehow, it all worked out. That is to say, the timetable I filled in for myself clashed not a bit with the ones the others had made. Perhaps it was a form of telepathy.

Then we made our first fatal mistake. We assigned one of the teachers to be In Charge of the Timetable. This poor soul now had to prepare empty grids for all the teachers, and supply us all with pencils with erasers at the other end. While we sat in a circle, she would sit on the ground with a large grid and a pencil in each hand. Someone would say: "Five periods of English with the Tamalas, two of those with so and so, and the remaining three with such and such, except for one of them where I want it combined with the entire middle school". Almost before this was uttered, the next person would say: "Five periods of craft with the Ketakis, nicely spaced out, but it can only be on Wednesdays and Thursdays". Followed by: "Twelve periods of anything with the juniors, and we don't yet have a teacher". This went on for a while, the In Charge writing and erasing frantically, telling us now and then what to fill into our own grids. Eventually, she would stop after a couple of hours and say: "I'll work on this at home, okay? Give me a month."

When the timetable was presented to the rest of us, we were inevitably shocked and disappointed. Nothing seemed right somehow. Was this the wonderful year we had imagined,





holistic, leisure-filled, slipping seamlessly between academic and nonacademic pursuits? And then began the appeals, to change or add something or other. The In Charge by now was a wizard of timings, days and slots. One had only to say, "Can you…" and she would reply: "Switch the Tuesday single Palasha library with Friday's single Bilwa Hindi and exchange that with Thursday's single Tamala math…" and so on.

Suddenly one day, someone gifted us a computer software programme that does timetables automatically. This should not have surprised us; teachers In Charge of the timetable had already come to resemble computers in many ways. Yet we were sadly misled by the word 'automatically'. If anything, the programme made the work harder. From what I understand, you enter into the programme all your requirements. At some point the programme says: "Are you kidding??" and stops taking any more requirements. Then it generates a timetable according to its own wishes.

From time to time, one or another teacher will suggest hesitantly that we ourselves are responsible for the timetable. We want too much, and we have too many constraints. But no, our timetable is a monster of its own creation. All we want is the best, most balanced, day, week and year for ourselves and our children. Yet it persists in filling our days with nonstop activity.

Nowadays our timetable teacher In Charge is tech-savvy. He exudes confidence and does not need paper or pencils. He says he has gone 'beyond the programme'. The timetable is sent to us by email, and is colour coded (however, most of us have not yet deciphered the code) and smart-looking. If you make a colour printout and put it up on your wall, it can be a stunning piece of contemporary art. But do not be deceived by its beauty: the timetable still rules our lives.

Projects in junior school

A group of children seem to be moving gently (some of them also gracefully!) pretending to be the waves of a large ocean. They slowly begin to rise and lift their arms, while another child stands as the big bright sun. They huddle together to form clouds and down pours the rain.... a dance or body movements class? Science maybe? Could be free play, but would the child choose to perform the water cycle during free play? Perhaps. Move on to another location in the junior school and you hear the loud banter of a group of five. You walk closer and find some of them busily mixing mud mortar while others attempt to piece together irregular shaped stones to build a wall of their house – an exercise they find akin to doing a jigsaw puzzle. You hear a child estimate the number of layers of stone they will need to complete the wall, as they enthusiastically pick up a basket to collect more building material. Guesses are voiced and building work eagerly continues.

These are descriptions are of project classes ('water' and 'buildings and structures') and the activities mentioned are only a fragment of the several varied activities planned as part of the project. Discouraging distinct subject boundaries, allowing for space to explore possible topics of interest, the need for hands-on experience, the possibility of independent research: the project approach demands these features. It allows for an integrated approach to learning, facilitating a process devoid of distinct subject groups. Those of us who have had the experience of learning through subjects as water tight compartments are aware of how they impede or restrict thinking and preclude us from making relevant connections or links in the learning process.

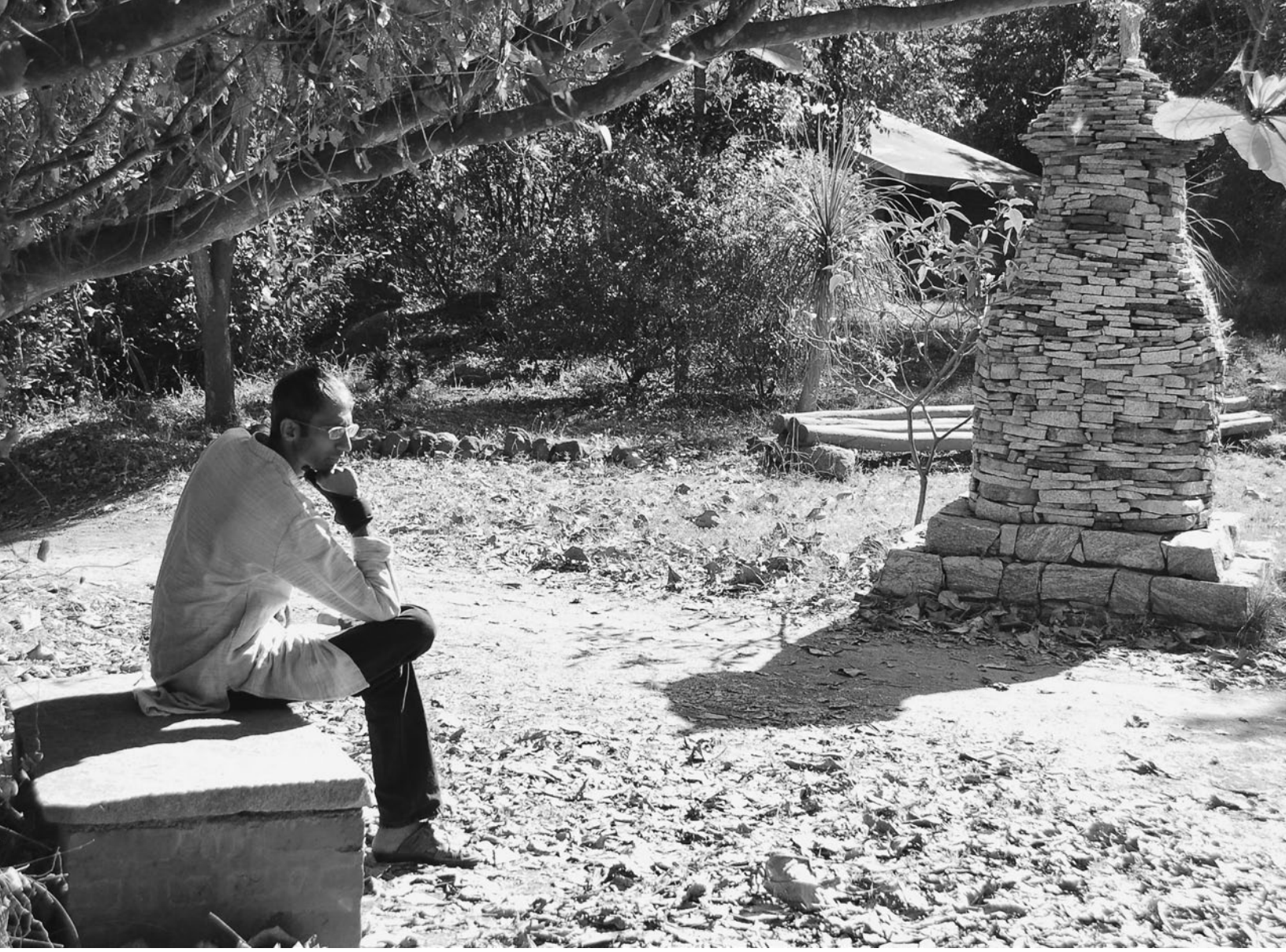
What are the objectives of the Project approach?

- To create a sense of wonder and curiosity
- To explore a theme or topic without categorising activities into rigid subject groups, enabling the process of making connections or links in what is learnt
- To provide a variety of experiences like body movements, games, observation, exploration, art, craft, quiet reflection, language, research and presentation skills
- To encourage children to raise questions, to study in greater depth any aspect of the topic that interests them
- To enable them to share with each other their experiences and learning

Projects imply a whole range of varied activities. In the building project, for example, the children constructed a structure with materials available in school (mud, stone and bamboo). They experimented with the strength of structures and observed the actual construction of a house. They researched aspects of lifestyle, terrain and climate which impact the choice of housing, both now and in the past. The water project included listening to stories, painting and poetry writing. The children performed experiments to observe the properties of water and recorded their findings. They went on a field trip to T G Halli dam, and researched a little on current affairs such as oil spills. They even gathered data on their own families' water consumption patterns!

The planning of the project is an interesting and motivating process and gives the adult ample freedom to incorporate a wide range of experiences. This calls for locating resources (such as people, audio visuals, field trips and books), estimating the time required for the planned activities and making appropriate material. While a lot of planning and preparation is done, it is also imperative to provide room for activities to develop organically while in class, in discussion with children and drawing upon their interests and ideas. For example, when we discussed water pollution as part of the water project, the children were keen on planning a skit for this theme. It was an idea the children conceived and they wanted this skit to be a part of their project presentation, for which they diligently practiced. Both projects culminated with wonderful assembly presentations which they performed enthusiastically.

The children fondly recollect experiences of their project class; they look forward to such classes and so do the adults. After a project class, children don't just remember facts and details; rather, they seem to look at things with wonder, and are happy and eager to learn.



We are happy to invite applications from individuals interested in self enquiry, who have specific skills to offer in terms of teaching, administrative duties, pastoral care etc. Applicants should be excited by living on 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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Compiled by Kamala Mukunda and Venkatesh Onkar

Campus: Village Varadenahalli, Magadi Taluk, Ramanagaram District 562 120, India.
phone: +91-92415 81342 / 81345, +91-80-27705749
Mailing Address: 545, Banagiri Nagar, Banashankari 3rd Stage, Bangalore 560 085, India
email: info@cfl.in, website: www.cfl.in