



Bubble worlds

A few years ago, we had written an article for this newsletter entitled “Our children and the real world.” That article touched upon various meanings of the phrase “the real world”: the world of global poverty and struggle, the world of our achievements and finally the real world of our emotional lives. One dimension the previous piece did not consider was the real world of the environment and our place in it.

We have chosen to locate our school in a rural setting, almost fifty kilometres away from Bangalore. Our campus, while it is beautiful in the manner of dry deciduous forested land in rocky terrain, is a real challenge to manage. There are problems regarding water availability and fire management, among others. However, we have felt that such a setting is a vital part of education, for those lucky enough to have the resources to acquire it. Why have we created an educational campus in a rural setting? What are the aims of such a decision? It is not just a response to the nostalgia we urban folk feel for “being close to nature” and “getting away from it all.”

Rather, we feel this campus is important for reasons to do with a profound disconnect we experience with the living world, and the implications this has for the health of the globe.

Krishnamurti often framed his talks with a description of the world turmoil facing us, in his terms, politically, religiously, economically—and environmentally. Even though the exact nature of the ecological malaise was only dimly guessed at during his lifetime, his observations have an uncannily prescient feel about them, as does his sense of the interconnected nature of the crises.

Projections for the future of the planet are ominous. The exact degree (pun intended) of the problem is unclear, but the outcomes over the coming century are painfully obvious. Rising temperatures mean melting ice caps and glaciers; world-wide drought on an unprecedented scale; flash floods; rising sea levels leading to the flooding of coastal areas; the mass migrations of millions whose way of life, directly dependent on land and sea, is put at risk; failing crops;



forest fires in an increasingly hot and dry world; and, finally, deep conflict and breakdown in societies as individuals and groups battle for critical resources and power. Of course, the poor and the marginalised in all societies will feel the brunt of global warming the most keenly. All of this is not even to begin to mention the scale of destruction of life forms crucial to the planet and to regulating the entire network of life, an ethical responsibility that we humans alone must bear, however reluctantly.

Deniers notwithstanding, this is the broad scientific consensus, so repeatedly articulated as to become clichéd. Cliché or not, perhaps one role of our education can be to keep these rather simple truths in front of our eyes and minds at all times, so that we cannot move away from them, to see what intelligent responses we can find to the issues surrounding us, if any at all.

Could one deep source of the problem be, simply, our diminishing contact with and lack of concern for “nature”? Not the sentimental city-dweller’s conception of nature: flowers, sunsets, evening stars. Rather, we are talking about the failure of a simple capacity to observe, and to hold internally as a way of contact, the extraordinary power of ordinary life: the powerhouses that are *honge* and *neem* trees, grasses, spiders, the ant on the bough, a bee-eater in flight, lizards basking, mating butterflies, crows playing on a dead tree. We seem to lack the capacity to sense, viscerally, this amazing inter-related nature of all life on the planet and our enmeshed-ness in this network. As a response to this inner lack, we would like to nurture in our educational processes the sense of biophilia, a simple love of life, as this seems so crucial to what being human is.

There is no fixed way of doing this nurturing, unfortunately. There is no formula, just as there is no formula that will enable us to understand any deep truth of existence. Perhaps just a sense of space and beauty around us on our

campus, the freedom to wander and observe, might foster this love. Or not.

We don’t know what the practical outcomes of such empathy might be when we are nurtured, adults and young ones alike, in a community of living beings. We cannot guarantee that out of this feeling, we will elect the right political candidates and join the right causes. The politics of conservation and its relationship to the state and to corporations in different parts of the world, the balance between human and non-human: these are obviously very complex questions. Our educational aim is not just to acquire more political or scientific knowledge or to join more movements. Rather, the first step to healing the crisis is expressed most elegantly by Lovelock: *We need*

most of all to renew that love and empathy for nature that we lost when we began our love affair with city life. This renewal is an endless process, and we can only begin it in our own humble way.

It may already be too late. Some scientists feel that we have already crossed the tipping point, that the planet may be jumping to a new, much hotter equilibrium that will profoundly affect life in its entirety. In other words, nothing we do now may matter much in the long run. On top of which, the political and economic barriers to achieving any form of global consensus are formidable. Love and empathy are slender threads indeed to hang our hopes on.



To juxtapose and think about *media* against the background of *nature* seems perversely old-fashioned. It sets up simplistic divisions and polarizes thinking. Nevertheless, we do need to urgently consider, in the context of all the above, the world of media gadgets and apps that has become so much an intrinsic part of the fabric of our lives, young and old, and to consider the educational responses to this world.

The ancient Greeks apparently railed against writing, as this was seen as (potentially) corrupting thought, memory and the spoken word. Medieval Europeans (the powerful ones, presumably) railed against the printing press and the dangers of democratizing knowledge. When TV was invented, there were concerns about the corrupting influence of this new technology. All these innovations turned out ‘fine.’ Therefore, the logic goes, there is nothing much to worry about regarding the current onslaught of smart phones and the social media networks we are all continually plugged into. These are merely illustrations of the power of the human mind to find new ways of extending its thought and network of relationships and communication.

Perhaps. But in rationalizing our digital behaviour thus,

we are overlooking some worrying tendencies. We, adults and young, like to stay indoors all day, and we spend many hours under the spell of one flickering screen or another. The power of the bubble worlds generated by the internet, with its seductive possibilities for communication, is immense. Surely this fascination must have some impact on the way we view, in contrast, the natural world, its relevance and its possibilities, and indeed its very future? E O Wilson, while exploring the Amazon basin in search of new insect species, writes of his encounter with the rain forest: *I savoured the cathedral feeling expressed by Darwin in 1832 when he first encountered tropical forest near Rio de Janeiro ("wonder, astonishment and sublime devotion fill and elevate the mind")*. However excited we become over a YouTube video or a cute posting on Facebook, I suspect that *wonder* and *devotion* are not quite the terms we will use to describe our feelings. Our feelings regarding nature do however matter, since we belong to a class of people with the power to change its face.

In education, we must remain continually alive to whatever impacts us and how we respond to it. What is the quality of mind needed to look at this problem, the problem of our alienation from the natural world and our increasing absorption in the digital one? Can we distinguish between an agonised fascination with the products of our own thought—an endless delving into bubble worlds—and an absorption in

a rich world of complexity and beauty that points to a reality that we cannot invent? How, in daily living and in dialogue and in the activities we do, can we keep such possibilities open in our minds? It seems that we cannot seek simple answers, but keeping such questions alive, investigating them, dialoguing about them, seems to bring about, at the very least, a hope of intelligent responses.

There is no romantic deep past in which humans remained “in balance” with nature. The ecological records seem to show that from its very beginnings, the human species shaped forests and landscapes profoundly across the globe (though of course the power we now possess to destroy the delicate fabric of life is terrifying). We are a technological species, and the crisis we face now probably has its roots very early in our history. At CFL, we would like to use our small educational context to explore the roots of this crisis in consciousness. Obviously we cannot prescribe any solutions, concrete or general; it would be presumptuous to do so, given the depth of the issue and the staggering range of the human contexts in which it is playing out. But we would like to suggest that the quality of mind that looks at the problem and its solutions is crucially important. In the openness of intense questioning, we may stumble upon the freedom to look, observe and live in our shared world with the energy of presence rather than absence.



Comings and goings

Every year, visitors from various places and walks of life enrich our programs and speak to our students. Some stay for longer stretches and weave into the routines of community life, and some visit with a focused presentation in

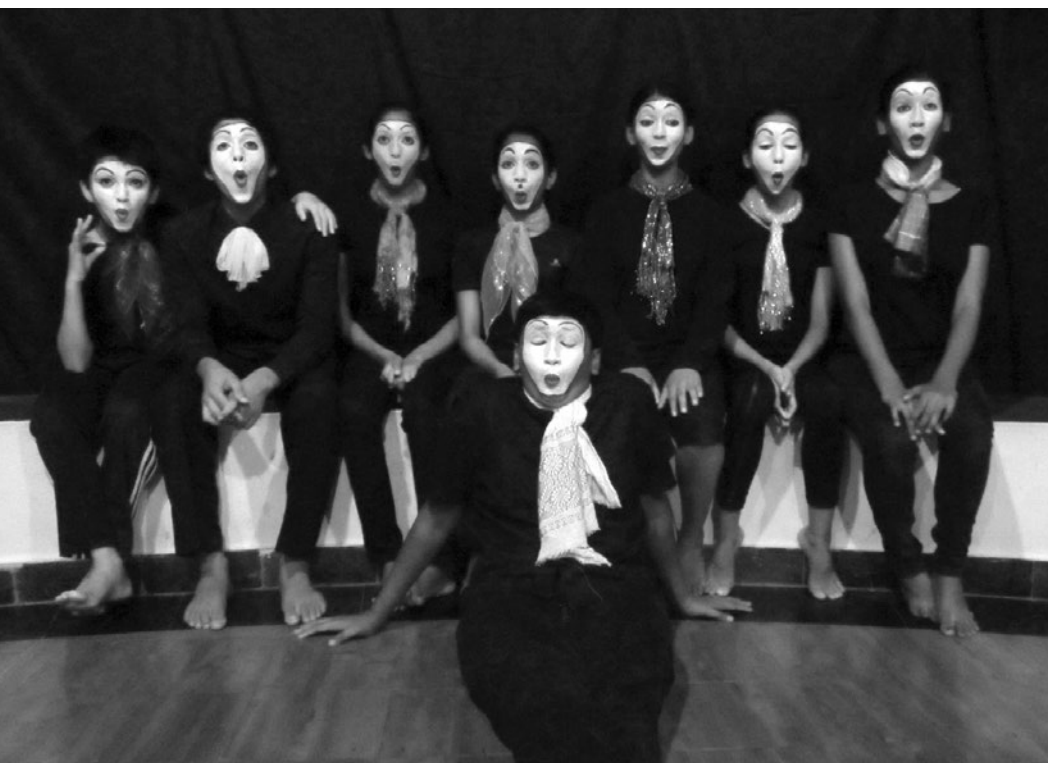
mind, making impressions on our children and providing food for thought!

As part of the senior library program the following people visited and interacted with many groups: Rohini Mohan, Bangalore-based journalist and acclaimed author of *The Seasons of Trouble*, an account of the Sri Lankan conflict; Vanamala Vishwanatha, acclaimed translator, Professor of English at Azim Premji University (APU), and former parent of the school; Lawrence Liang, a legal researcher and lawyer based in Bangalore, known for his legal campaigns on issues of public concern. Lawrence also spent the morning with the Akshas (class 8) students, presenting a perspective on the Indian Chinese community, its history and identity within India, as part of their social studies course. Finally, the middle schoolers gathered one library session to hear Arundhati Venkatesh,

a Bangalore based author of children's books, playfully describe the process of writing and an author's life.

We also hosted visitors to our senior General Studies program. Veena Srinivasan from the Centre for Environment and Development, ATREE, conducted a session with the senior students about the Arkavati watershed. Benson Issac, who is with Azim Premji University, took a session on city and caste; Kishor Bhat and Manish Gautam, academicians, took a session on reservations; human rights activist Madhuri Krishnaswami, who works closely with tribal and marginalized communities in rural Madhya Pradesh, visited CFL and spoke to senior students. Vijay Modur spoke to seniors on biology and cutting edge research.

Derek Hook, a long time friend and supporter of CFL, and an annual visitor to the school from the UK, engaged us



with his compelling stories and also conducted a workshop with middle school children on the art of storytelling.

Ruwanthie de Chickera spoke to the older children on theatre; she is one of the foremost playwrights and theatre directors in Sri Lanka and is currently responsible for drafting the National Cultural Policy in Sri Lanka—a task that began as a citizens' initiative and was subsequently endorsed and mandated by the Sri Lankan Government.

Nature, environment, nutrition and farming have always been important elements in our curriculum. This year, Deepika Kundaji interacted with older students. She is an organic gardener and seed saver who conserves more than 90 traditional varieties of vegetables at Pebble Garden, a highly eroded piece of land regenerated with no external inputs. Amita Patel, doctor and nutritionist, interacted with us around issues connected to food and health. Her sessions with students of different age groups helped us develop a more informed and practical perspective in the area of food in our lives. Ashish

Kothari, of Kalpvriksh, a Pune-based organization which has worked on environmental issues for over twenty five years, spent a few days with us. With our senior students, he shared inspiring accounts and insights from country-wide community-based endeavours in the areas of education, health, livelihoods and conservation. Suchitra and John, friends of current parents, spoke with some groups about environmental issues. Tanaaz Ankelssaria conducted a *Kabaad se Jugaad* or 'toys from trash' session with the youngest groups.

A visit by Prashanth Pillai, a slackline enthusiast and co-founder of The Slackline Company, brought a buzz to the school day! He conducted a half day workshop on slacklining in January for children of all age groups as well as teachers who were interested, and also donated a slackline to CFL. The workshop served as a fitting run-up to the Sports Day in the end of January.

Those who worked and interacted with the community over a period of time, like a term, slipped into our clean-up rotas and dialogues about living together! Among these visitors were

returning friends, Chaiti and Shane, who are now settled in a sustainable farming community in Canada. They spent the third term with us, hitting the ground running, helping with a junior school play, craft and woodwork, meal preparation, and some classes. Towards the end of their stay, Shane's parents, Alan and Ginny Warner, joined us and engaged with students in the kitchen, land and classes on environmental management.

In the first term, Athri Rangathan, a young student interested in education, and working on a thesis from a US college, became an active participant in our community. Purwa Kushwaha, who has translated important works in education into Hindi, such as John Holt's and A S Neill's writings, stayed with us for a few weeks bringing grace and warmth into all her interactions. We were also honoured to have Gerard Bayle, again this year, working on theatre with various age groups and focusing on the serious play, *Uncle Vanya*, by Anton Chekhov, with the seniors (and a Pirate Play with the youngest ones!) His touch of both lightness and rigour to all activities is unique, and the children have begun to look forward to Februaries with Gerard!

This year, Sindhu Radhakrishna, a primatologist and faculty member at the National Institute for Advanced Studies, Bangalore, has started a study on the social behaviour of slender lorises in the CFL campus. Her nightly forays began in February. We look forward to learning with her as she delves into loris life which she tells us is full of intrigue and complexity! A group of library educators from QUEST who work with adivasi schools in Northern Maharashtra spent two days in the CFL library observing practices trying to understand the spirit of the Open library. Aarti Srinivasan, an advertising professional from Mumbai with a keen interest in reading and books, spent a

week closely observing and interacting with children in the CFL library.

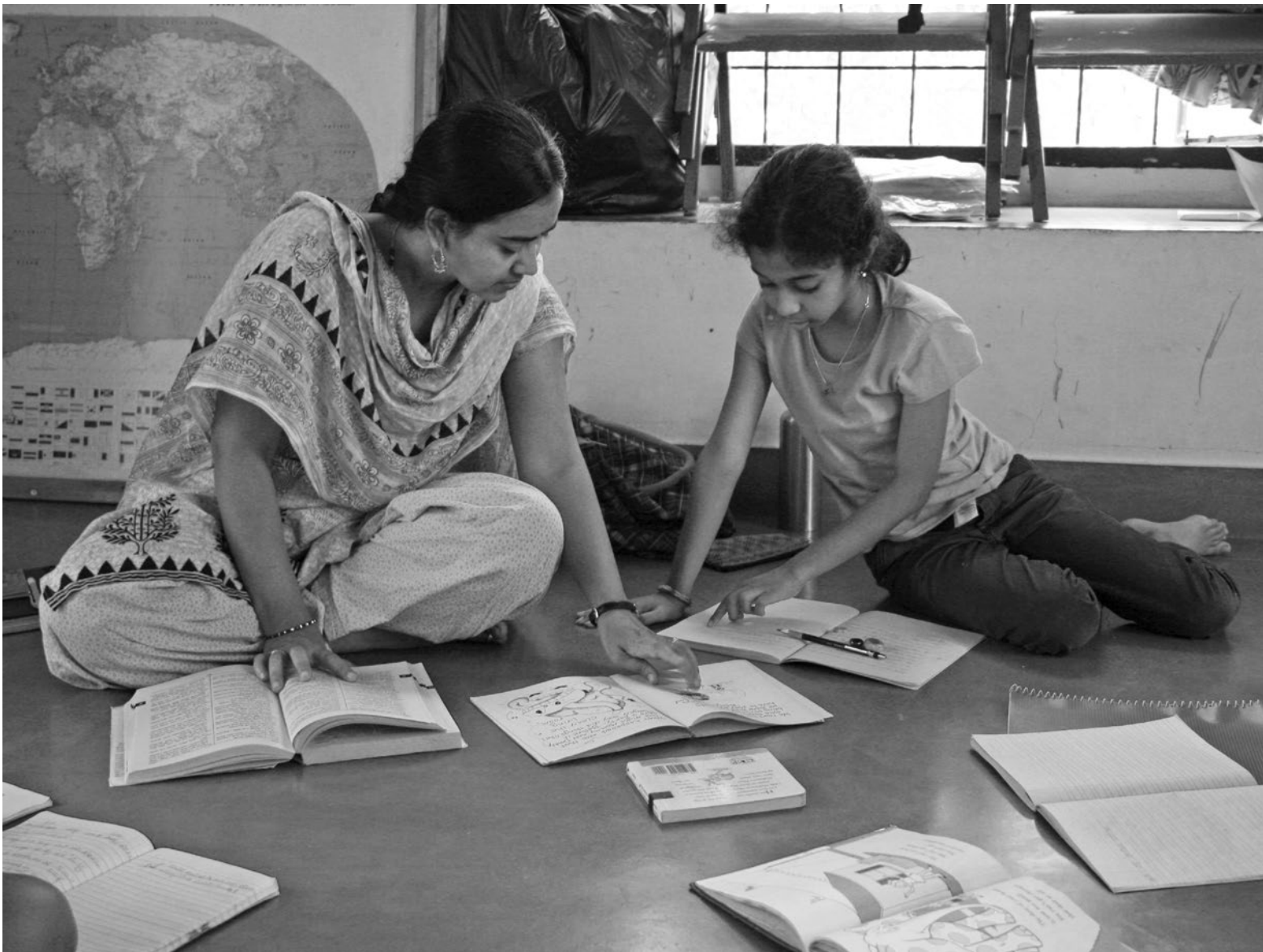
In our first term, an intern from TISS, Sirisha Kandukuri, spent dedicated time observing and shadowing particular groups in school. We also hosted a group of Azim Premji Foundation principals from around the country, who talked at length with teachers and made close observations of classroom interactions as well as notes on curricular goals.

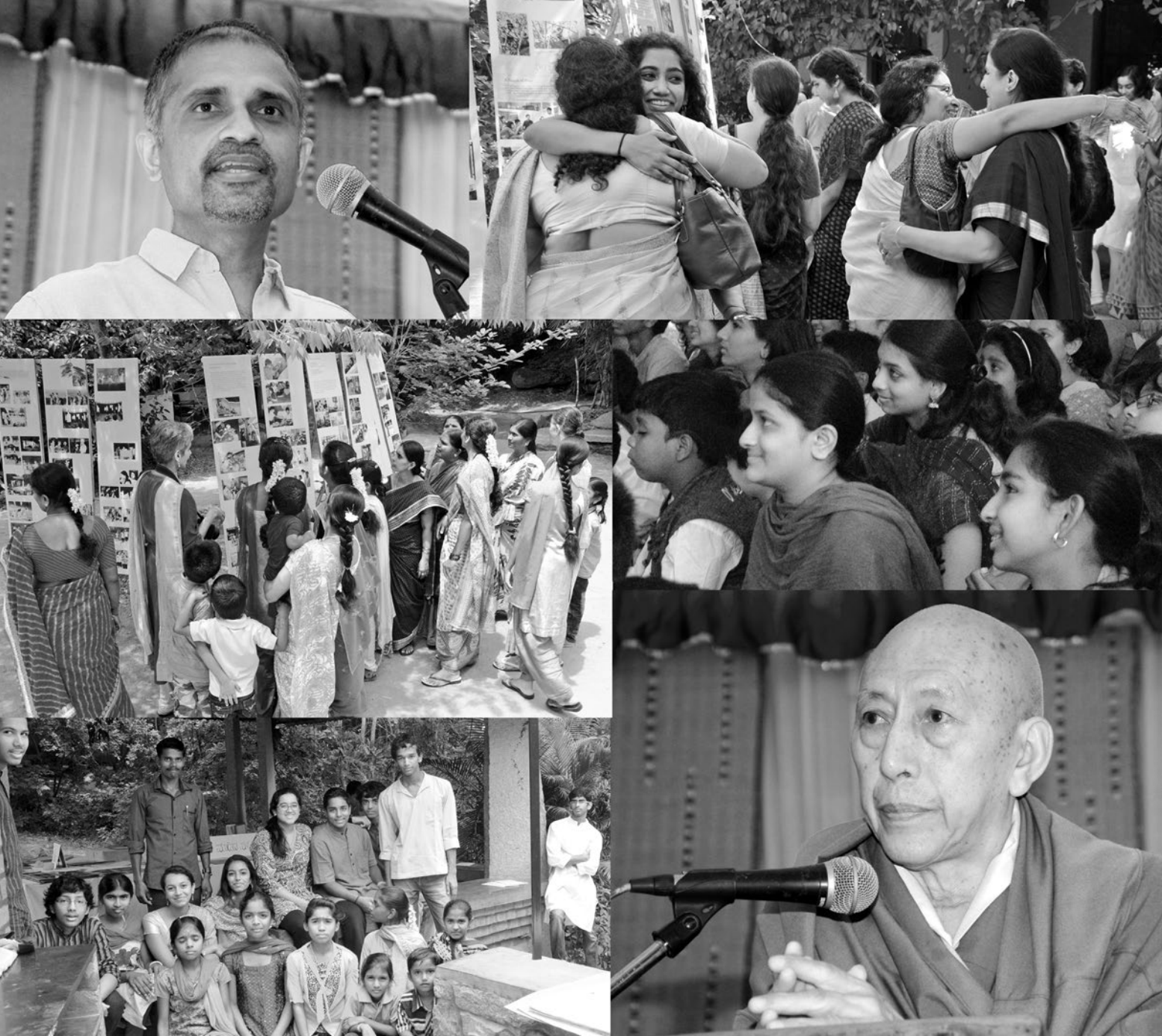
We won't forget the day Nancy Lesh, a dhrupad artist who performs on the cello, filled the library with her music and rhythm. Nancy Lesh started her journey into music at a young age learning to play the cello and was a part of a philharmonic orchestra and moved into Indian classical music in the 1980s.

This year, the world of Indian film and theatre came to life with visitors and activists in those fields. Nandita Das, her son Vihan, and writer Ali Mir were at CFL for a week in the first term. Nandita's discussions with students included the complex theme of identity, ascribed and assumed, the role of influential people in her own life and the politics of colour in the film world. Ali Mir and Nandita were also able to find space to work on the script of a movie-in-the-making on the Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto. Ali Mir also interacted with senior students in the library class, introducing them to the writing of Manto in the context of the partition of India, as part of the library course discussing literatures from conflict zones.

Naseeruddin Shah was part of a lively conversation with the entire school during assembly time. As our students presented questions and concerns, he shared his own life-stories and convictions from the heart. He urged young people to pursue their passions, whatever they may be, with joy and zeal.

Arunima Roy spent an evening interacting with the senior students sharing her experiences as an executive producer in the Bombay Hindi film industry. She spoke, at length, about the various stages involved in film making and touched upon the politics inherent in the industry, gender discrimination, the gradual increase of women in certain roles traditionally held by men, financial transparency and corruption.





August 1st 2015

It wasn't the usual celebration at CFL this year with just a small community of people. Well-wishers, donors, friends and relatives, former students and their parents joined us on August 1st 2015 to celebrate CFL's 25th birthday. The day began with warm greetings and hugs, affectionate smiles and conversations; for some it was a rendezvous after very many years. Suddenly, CFL seemed much bigger!

Professor Samdhong Rinpoche and Anurag Behar graced this occasion and gave us talks. Professor Samdhong Rinpoche drew our attention to the climate of violence we live in, our lack of care for the environment, the resulting degradation and the relevance of Krishnamurti's teachings in the present world. His special request to the children was to nurture the capacity to think independently. Replete with

amusing stories, Anurag Behar gave us glimpses into the world of teachers in distant places in India. His inspiring talk informed us about their commitment and the challenges they face in their role as teachers. A special meal allowed us more time with our guests that day! A display of photographs gave us a peek into the life of CFL over twenty-five years.

Rinpoche-ji and Anurag also released a CD of our favourite Bhavana songs and a small book of writings on education brought out for the purpose of this occasion (Notes from a Small School).

On August 2nd, our neighbours from the villages around CFL trickled in in small groups, to visit us and have lunch together. They were welcomed by teachers and senior students, with the soft hum of our Bhavana songs in the background.

A brief report on Worlds of Fear: School Cultures

In December 2015, CFL hosted a conference that we called Worlds of Fear: School Cultures. The idea behind the conference was to explore the impact of fear on learning, and to discuss and understand whether fear needs to be a motivator at all.

The conference was organised around talks by eminent educators and question-answer sessions that followed the talks. The entire group of participants (around 130 individuals) also formed a dozen small discussion groups every day. These discussions were open-ended and exploratory in nature and often took their lead from the presentation of the day.

The keynote address was by Professor Shyam Menon, Vice-chancellor of Ambedkar University, Delhi. His was a wide-ranging talk, covering general considerations of fear in education to exams, the role of parents in sustaining fear, and the broader emotional dynamics of school, to highlight a few threads. Professor Poonam Batra of CIE, Delhi, similarly touched on a wide range of themes: “taming” children in schools, the public examination system, loss of identity in an environment of fear, and segregation in schools. Mala Giridhar, a clinical psychologist from Sirsi, spoke about the effects of stress on adolescents, and Dr Sonali Nag, from the Promise Foundation, Bangalore, spoke about the fears that bring some students to her clinic. Dr Shailesh Shirali and Alok Mathur, from the Krishnamurti Foundation India, both spoke about the theme of fear from the viewpoint of

Krishnamurti’s philosophy of education. On the final day, Dr Vidita Vaidya, from TIFR Mumbai, spoke about current research on the neurobiology of fear.

Apart from these talks, we also had presentations on curricular approaches to fear in school systems by well known educators. Amukta Mahapatra, the director of SchoolScape, spoke on working with teacher educators and encountering fears in that context. Jayashree Nambiar, principal of The School KFI, presented her views on how the school is committed in its specifics to understanding the problem of fear in its curriculum. Jane Sahi, of Sita School, talked of how young children process and “handle” fear. Umashanker Periodi, from the Azim Premji Foundation, gave a talk summarizing a study that he and his team had done with schoolteachers. The study was aimed at understanding how teachers viewed the use of fear in a classroom and in school structures generally, and what fears teachers themselves experienced.

We also held a workshop around the theme of understanding children’s fears in a classroom and understanding the motivations of teachers’ actions. The workshop used role-play and discussion to explore these themes.

The participants, in a feedback session at the end of the conference, expressed that they had been exposed to an unusually wide and rich range of ideas and practices, and this was indeed the experience of the CFL community as well. We would like to thank all those involved in the conference for making it so vibrant.





Emotional excursions

Sliding down smooth slopes of skin, dripping steadily or dropping intermittently on floors and tables; a large brown piece suddenly breaking away like the tip of an iceberg, almost carried to the floor by the stream of white cream, before it is strategically saved by a watchful hand.

I study a gang of fifteen 10-11 year olds as they smile and laugh, enjoying their race against time with fast melting choc-o-bars in a modest restaurant on a warm, humid night on the west coast of Kerala. It is the eleventh day of a thirteen day excursion, and the first thought that comes to mind is "Oh my gosh, I am again sharing a room with these guys tonight. No place to escape!" This is soon followed by a series of instructions to them on how to avoid making a royal mess of the place and themselves!

My colleague and I look at each other across the table and exchange "I've had it!" looks. Yet the next moment, I am whipping out my camera taking happy snaps of the little rascals battling their ice creams, not wanting to miss this gorgeous photo opportunity.

And so it has been: moments of extreme irritation and frustration at their obliviousness to their immediate surroundings, interlaced and thankfully dominated by moments of affection, frivolity and lightness as we navigate through their minds and they through ours!

Over the last two weeks, I have been impressed by their ability to engage with a variety of resource people, asking questions, showing genuine interest in each one's work, interacting with warmth and sincerity with these people they just met. On the other hand, I have been witness to intra group dynamics and politics ranging from the inane to the

manipulative, and a seeming self-centredness and lack of care for others in the group, by some.

With every interaction there is a tendency to relate based on an image of each child. The moment I set that image aside and start afresh, I see a new response from them, some hope of a different way of relating. Yet just as fast, the moment the child does or says something that conforms to my old image, I see how I can quickly justify it. Just as quickly I need to catch myself from reacting the old way, and sadly, I am often too late and I can hear the child and myself in our old patterns of relating and reacting to each other. It is never too late to start however, and if I can just be mindful and attentive at that moment, the next time it presents itself, there are immense possibilities!

Some questions my colleagues and I ponder include: are we expecting too much for their age in terms of how they relate? How did we relate with our peers at that age? Why are they not aware of the world beyond their group? Why can't they seem to hear or listen to instructions? And perhaps on a lighter note: why can't they tell the difference between clean and unclean (eg sitting on a train floor is not exactly clean!)? Why on earth are they stepping on each others' bags? Why do they walk on mattresses and (horror) pillows? Why do some of them gravitate towards fast moving vehicles while the vehicles are in motion? Why do some of them have bottomless pits for stomachs? Why does one child needing to use the bathroom set off a chain reaction? And, if we can't beat them, shall we just join them?

I wonder what they must think of the teachers. They have to put up with us for two weeks and although the relationship between teachers and students is informal and



affectionate, they are ultimately at our command, as we are responsible for them. The informality is a double-edged sword (or shall we say, butter knife): on the one hand it allows for bantering, affection and a certain freedom in relating, but on the other hand, I feel I do not hold back when certain behaviours need “correction”. I feel like they are my children, and thus censure them freely. Interestingly, although they incorporate some of the advice, they seem to forget many of the admonishments and we are able to continue relating with affection.

Over the two weeks, I see an increased cooperativeness and selflessness in some children and a possible inertia to reflect or change in others. I find myself judging them less, questioning my assumptions and understanding the reasons each child may be a certain way. And I also see my quickness in sliding back to my old patterns of relating.

Excursions are not just about visiting places and learning about different ecosystems or people, past and present. They are about learning to relate to each other and learning about ourselves and our own patterns of being. Either through the situations they place us in, or the fact that there is no escape from the group, they bring out behaviours that one would not see otherwise. Ultimately, however boisterous some in the group have been, I have also seen thoughtfulness and caring, cooperativeness and sharing. I am even ready to extend the excursion by another week! And so, on a heartwarming note, are some of the children. I’m missing them already—until the day after the trip, I cross a road without fifteen children in tow for the first time in 13 days! Then I feel, perhaps two weeks was just right!

Mentoring new teachers

If you are crazy enough to join CFL as a new teacher, in your welcome package you get several goodies. A room with a view but not necessarily a loo, a brand new timetable, a calendar, an address book, a glossary with all the jargon you have to learn from botibetta to zulu classes...and also a Mentor!

CFL is amazingly informal, but like many places that have been around for a while, some things have been set in place, and there are traditions that exist. How does a new teacher settle into such a space and find his or her own voice and rhythm? After many years of throwing them into the deep end, thus retaining only those who survived, we have moved to a system of mentorship. The mentor is usually a teacher who has been with CFL for a while and has a feel for the ropes. Many of you may wonder why this is necessary in a teacher-run school like ours. But it is precisely because we are non-hierarchical that the mentor’s role becomes crucial, and we hope to share some thoughts on this role here. To keep the he-s and she-s straight in this short article, we will assume a female mentor and a male mentee!

A new teacher has many things to deal with when he becomes part of the community. To begin with, the mentor has to help him establish a healthy bond with students, who can be very friendly and affectionate—but can also constantly test boundaries. Students often mistake an informal, non-authoritarian teacher with a ‘buddy’. Sometime they feel confused when the same friendly teacher has to be stern or reprimand them for inappropriate behaviour. The greatest challenge for a teacher starting out is to create a relationship with students which is not based on fear, yet which allows for true communication to take place. Children sometimes use the freedom given to them in school to make rather personal comments. A lesson best learnt early for a novice teacher is to not engage his ego with that of the children, falling into a power relationship. It is the mentor’s role to alert him to these movements, and explore how one can navigate them.

Then there is the relationship with colleagues. Since we have no chain of command and hardly any buffers, building healthy robust relationships is the toughest demand CFL places on the adults in the community. The mentor is not exempt from this demand, of course! The new teacher may find himself in conflict with one or another colleague, and may need help sorting out these misunderstandings. A mentor can help and advise, but only by being humble and honest about her own difficulties in this arena, perhaps helping the new person not to make the same mistakes!

The mentor’s role is also to go into the craft of teaching: how to prepare for a class, what to be alert to, how to gauge if the students are feeling secure in a sense of learning together, suggesting material to read or watch, and also recom-

mending that the new teacher engage with other colleagues about teaching. Perhaps a difficult but important job for the mentor is to encourage him in his vocation, while deciding if teaching is a calling for him at all. Contrary to the old saying *those who can't do, teach*, teaching is certainly not for the faint-hearted! One must really love children and be excited about relating and communicating with them, because one deep reward of working here is the affection you share with them.

All decisions in CFL are taken on a consensual basis, through a long process of meeting and discussing every week. For the new teacher, these meetings can be intense. The meetings have no formal structure, and emotions, while not invited, are not kept at bay either! The meetings are a microcosm of human consciousness: there is history, image-making, old hurts affecting rational processes, also care and attention to detail, a commitment to excellence and cooperation, affection and compassion. The mentor helps navigate this complex world. Decisions taken can sometimes be perplexing, they may not follow expectations, may break precedents or make precedents, be inconsistent with previous policy, and appear to be 'case-by-case'. It is precisely this cocktail that the mentor has to help the new teacher understand. In thinking together, we need to use the past judiciously. Mistakes can and do happen, but as long as there is humility and opportunity to re-examine and review decisions, there will be a letting-go of previously held positions, and a potential for intelligent functioning.

The mentor has two more onerous responsibilities! One is to help the new teacher understand what it means to take 'responsibility' for the whole school. At CFL the teachers with the help of a skeletal support staff are in charge of all aspects of the school, from academics to administration. It is an illusion to believe that everyone can do everything, but it may



not be a utopian dream to feel that everyone can understand the essence of what each area requires, and learn to ask the 'right' questions of each other. Perhaps the mentor can help in discovering what these questions are.

The final responsibility is for the mentor to dialogue with her mentee about the fundamental questions that CFL is based on. The starting point can be the questions that the new teacher brings to CFL from his own life, or new ones that arise in the course of settling into the new community. The mentor must share her own perspectives, and be emotionally honest. Yet she should watch out that she does not foist her worldview and biases on her mentee, always remembering the old adage that the true teacher defends her pupils against her own personal influence.

Life in senior school hostels

Consider this: the comforts of a personal room, laptop, cell phone, iPod, unlimited wi-fi, and choice catering. Give or

take one or two comforts for accuracy. Now trade it with the following: academic classes through the week, study time every night, long dialogue sessions, courses that are not CIE exam requirements, land work and community service. It is an awful bargain, one must admit! Whatever kind of a deal this may be, such has been the bargain at CFL for a while now. And it is interesting to observe how rapidly-growing, autonomy-seeking adolescent individuals (aka senior school students), with an emerging sense of personal space and identity, take to this trade-off rather well year after year.





Living in a senior hostel on CFL campus means sharing one's life with others—adults and students alike—to a far greater degree than anywhere else. Sharing not just the physical room space and other (mentionable or unmentionable) personal material, but also sharing a relational space, where one has to stretch consciously to learn about another similar-to-oneself, complex organism called a peer! Added to this, the recurring daily demands of friendship, academic work, maintenance of common property and space, the mixed feelings that arise in being more or less constantly visible to a group of adults called hostel parents, makes for a motley mix of eventful, entertaining and exhausting school life experiences.

It must be difficult for a quasi-adult to understand the limits of freedom in an informal living space where there are norms (yes, we have them at CFL, fairly clearly, even though we don't believe it is as simple as that: make norms and live happily ever after). While these norms are flexible and open to questioning in the broadest sense of the phrase, we keep hoping they don't become normative over time. The intention is not to condition students towards specific psychological and behavioural outcomes. This means allowing for difference and disagreement to emerge as much as seeking cooperation and care. This also means anyone in the community has to be willing to engage in conversations (polemical or otherwise) about issues of living together, and these often emerge in the senior hostels.

Life in the senior hostels goes on well on the whole! Sometimes, the daily negotiations around the norms of

bedtime, room cleanliness, underground tuck (aka junk food stash) etcetera etcetera could be tiring or hassling for an adult. Sorting and inquiring into the nature of these norms, day after day, batch after batch, depending on the argumentative quotient of an individual student, can be challenging for a hostel parent. However, there are also exciting discoveries about oneself and the other through these conversations that we chance upon, fumbling into possibilities for creative cultures to emerge. Like bizarre bedtime ghost stories, deep impromptu discussions, crossword solving missions, spontaneous singing and dancing and frolicking binges and the like.

A typical evening in a senior school hostel at CFL normally consists of the following: students aimlessly walking around, going to the other senior hostel on a emergency errand, solving interpersonal conflicts, avoiding books and writing material altogether, missing home, drinking bedtime milk, spirited chatter post milk, pre-bedtime room gossip, pre-bedtime room snack and fleeting episodes of panic over incomplete homework!

So for the record: senior school hostels are lively, mirthful, thriving places for growing up together. We love our students and understand what their struggles are, and the common living areas are an important space of verbal and non-verbal dialogue, where senior school culture is created. And our alumni report with fondness the value of such an opportunity to grow up together. The trials, tribulations and the trade-offs are surely worth it!



We would like to thank all parent volunteers who gave generously of their time and energy towards helping the school in many crucial areas such as the kitchen and in other programmes.

We are in the process of consolidating our database. If you have received this newsletter as a hard copy (through the post), please do email us at info@cfl.in (with 'Database' in the subject box) in order for us to have your email id.

As in previous years, this year too we have received generous support from all our friends across the world. This commitment makes many aspects of our work possible. Thank you.

We continue to depend on such goodwill, in particular for our long-term financial needs. Any support we receive goes a long way towards sustaining our work. If you wish to contribute, please visit our website (www.cfl.in/support-us/how-can-i-help-cfl/) or email us at info@cfl.in, with 'Donation' in the subject box. We will get in touch with you to initiate the process.

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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