



Worlds of Fear: School Cultures

A record of the CFL 2015 conference

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CfL

Centre For Learning is grateful to Wipro Applying Thought in Schools
for supporting our conference, Worlds of Fear: School Cultures

Design: Studio Onion

Photo credits: Richa Bhavanam

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For private circulation only

CFL 2016

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I am afraid of teachers when they point out me while teaching to ask questions. When teachers are sad or very angry. I feel to cry when the teachers are talking of the book which I have not brought.

I will be worried, nervous or afraid first day when I saw teachers asking books for writing notes and on second day also. When I know the answer but I will be afraid of answering but I will be knowing answer, I feel afraid when leader or teacher are asking questions. Even in the exam, when I see the teacher in front of me, I will be nervous and feel afraid.

I feel afraid when I get less marks in which I get more marks always, when I see it for first time my hands and legs will be shaking. I will be sweating, my hand will be wet.

When I am afraid I will cry, I will go down of the bench and I will hold my friend who sits next to me. I will write my feeling in one book or I will bite my fingers or I will be upset for whole day.

11 year-old from a private school in Bangalore

From the survey conducted by CFL and participating schools for the conference Worlds of Fear: School Cultures, December 2015.

Introduction

CFL turned 25 years old in 2015. As part of our celebration of working together and exploring ideas in a small school, we decided to hold a conference on the theme of fear in school cultures.

CFL appears to be a small community, but at any given time there are almost a hundred people on our campus. If you include the parents of the children, with whom we are in very close contact, that number rises to two hundred individuals. The intricacies of daily thought, feeling and emotion that can arise when two hundred individuals are trying to interact closely are actually mind-boggling. We are working with feelings of affection and love, irritation, avoidance, anxiety and fear, pleasure, pain: the inner worlds of humans are certainly very complex. In this whirlpool, we decided to focus on worlds of fear, for reasons that will become clear as you, the reader, go through this document.

The presentations and discussions during the conference opened up some very basic questions about fear that have interested us for many years. They allowed for new ideas and new perceptions regarding our work as educators.

You are all probably familiar with R K Narayan's lovely novel, *Swami and Friends*. Though it is mainly a funny book, written many decades ago, it contains many serious insights into the mind of the school-going child. Swami is frightened of going to school; he is scared of many of his teachers, he is frightened of losing his friends and is desperate to be popular and cool. Here is one glimpse into his mind. The teacher has just asked for homework:

Swaminathan left his seat, jumped on the platform, and placed his notebook on the table. While the teacher was scrutinizing the sums, Swaminathan was gazing on his face, which seemed so tame at close quarters... [at this point Swami has several critical thoughts about his teacher's appearance which are omitted here because they might be quite demoralizing at the beginning of a document on education!] His reverie was disturbed. He felt a terrible pain in the soft flesh above his left elbow. The teacher was pinching him with one hand, and with the other, crossing out all the sums. He wrote 'Very Bad' at the bottom of the page,

flung the note-book in Swaminathan's face, and drove him back to his seat.

Later on in the novel, Swami is being caned for some misdemeanour. In a fit of anger, he snatches the cane out of his headmaster's grasp, flings it out of the window and runs out of the school.

Swami's fears are treated quite lightly in this story, but for many thousands of students in India, fear, in school and outside, is not a laughing matter. And of course, the fears that Swami experiences are quite benign compared to what many students actually face in schools. Further, this fear that young people experience is a small bubble within wider fears in society. For us, this concern with fear in its widest sense was at the heart of this conference.

Spirit of the conference

Apart from the many interesting talks, we gave a lot of time to small group dialogues.

When we human beings communicate with each other, several interesting things happen to us. We speak from certain emotions and certain intellectual convictions. We listen to each other from within the screen of feelings and ideas. We are, generally, quick to agree and disagree, and to position ourselves within a group, aligning ourselves towards certain opinions and against other opinions.

Are there other possibilities of speaking and listening to each other? The small group discussions that we held every day offered us certain opportunities in communication. They allowed all individuals to speak freely, and indeed without fear. They were also a precious opportunity for each one of us to think about our own beliefs and opinions and why we happen to hold them. These beliefs can be about education, about society, about religion—indeed about anything at all. Perhaps all beliefs are just an accident of our birth and upbringing, and not a matter of rational choice as we may fondly think? Thus the dialogues were also a context for us to wonder about the emotions we have with regard to the world, and to question their solidity and their fixed nature.



So we conceived these small group discussions, and actually the conference as a whole, as a non-hierarchical conversation amongst individuals bound by a common interest. This conference was not meant to be an arena where we tried to convince each other of our particular points of view. We came from very diverse backgrounds, with very different experiences. Some of us were vastly experienced, while others were starting out in the journey of education. Some worked in alternative schools with just a handful of students in a class, while others worked with thirty or forty students at any given time. We had teachers from tribal schools and from schools for migrant workers' children. Nevertheless, an attitude of listening to each other, regardless of our particular life-history and educational experience, was itself exciting and transformative, creating a genuine learning environment for all of us.

In preparation for this conference, participating schools conducted surveys amongst their students. We sent four questions to each participating school, and requested the students to respond in an open-ended manner, without having to feel there was a right and a wrong answer. The four

questions were based on an earlier survey conducted by the Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools. The questions were about children's fears and how they responded to them:

What are the things you are afraid of?

Recall one or two situations that have made you worried, nervous or afraid.

How did you feel when you were experiencing the above? Do you remember what happened in your body and in your mind?

What did you do when you were afraid?

The schools responded to the surveys, and in many cases created posters and art work reflecting their responses to the questions. We displayed these during the conference and they were a focus of much interest. We are grateful to the participating schools for the care with which they took up this theme.

We would like to thank everyone who attended and supported the conference. We saw it as an exercise in creating meaning, which we now carry within us in our lives as educators, along with children. Who knows what ripples our conversations will have in the years to come.

Editors' note:

We have tried to capture most of what was shared during our conference, at least during the formal sessions. Some light editing was necessary, but for the most part, we retained the original tone and content of the speakers. We also sent the presenters the text of their talks, and some made a few minor modifications. A few questions and responses that were not in any way connected with the theme of the conference were omitted.

Acknowledgments

Many organisations and individuals made this conference a success, and we thank each and every one of them.

In particular, we thank:

Wipro Applying Thought in Schools for generously supporting all costs related to the conference

All speakers for so readily agreeing to be present and enrich our learning

All those who facilitated and documented the small group discussions

Avinash Veeraraghavan for his unstinting support in design work for all conference-related documentation

Richa Bhavanam for photo-documenting all sessions both formal and informal

I S N Prasad and Vandita Sharma for their invaluable support in making the souvenir possible

Shashidhara Adapa for help with creating tasteful and comfortable structures, and for his help with other equipment for the conference

Umashanker Periodi for conducting the survey on teachers' fears and for support with documentation

O R Rao for carefully editing the final draft of this document

Our alumni who wrote honestly about fear and learning in their own lives

Our senior students and alumni who served food and carried buckets of hot water with a ready smile

Our friends at the Krishnamurti Foundation India who have, over the years, always been there for us



Dr Shyam Menon has been a professor at the Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi, since 1994. He has, for the past seven years, been part of a team setting up a new public university of the social sciences and humanities, Ambedkar University Delhi. He has been the Vice Chancellor of AUD since its very inception. Earlier, he has been Dean, Faculty of Education; Proctor of the University of Delhi; Director, School of Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University and Professor at the Central Institute of Educational Technology, NCERT. He began his teaching career at the M S University of Baroda, where he taught for several years. His education was from the University of Kerala and the M S University of Baroda. He was also at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as a Fulbright Fellow. His work has mainly been in curriculum studies, higher education and teacher education. He edited the journal, Perspectives in Education, for many years. He was on the Task Force on Access and Equity in Higher Education constituted by the International Association of Universities. He is at present on the international advisory board of Comparative Education.

When CFL asked me to make this keynote address, I didn't quite realize

what I was getting into and this was about more than a year ago. At that point of time I thought I had enough time to learn and share my learning with you. Little did I realize life would just pass and I had not done anything. In the process I re-learned what fear was! That is one major achievement through this. All the same, I kept asking: who are the participants, where are they from and what background? I realized that there are a whole lot of diversities that the participants of this conference represent. I am struck with this feeling that I am going to be talking to those who are already initiated.

It's a bit like the story of Mark Twain. I don't know if you have heard this particular story. It is an interesting story, though I have never checked on its veracity. Mark Twain had witnessed great floods in the river Mississippi during his lifetime. He always used to narrate in great detail about the experiences his family and his friends went through in those difficult times. Whenever Mark Twain spoke to the rural folk, he brought up this topic of floods in the river Mississippi. And then when he was old, he had a prolonged illness, he was in a coma for several days and weeks and then he eventually died. And as all American writers do, he went straight to heaven! St. Peter himself was there to receive him and when Mark Twain came in, he said to St. Peter, "Look, I have a problem, I have not spoken to anybody for a few weeks because I was in a coma. So I need to talk to people urgently." St. Peter said *no problem*, and gathered a few people and Mark Twain started holding the court as he always used to do. He said, "You know, many years ago, there was this great flood in the river Mississippi," so on and so forth. Everybody looked polite and interested, except one old man sitting at the back looking rather bored. At some point, St. Peter nudged Mark Twain and asked, "You know who that old man is?" Mark Twain said he did not know. St. Peter replied, "He's Noah"! So, I feel a bit like Mark Twain. Talking about my little feat to Noah, to a gathering of Noahs.

I am thankful to CFL to share my thoughts with you. In doing this, I think they have taken a major risk. I am not a Krishnamurti scholar as someone asked me this morning, and I had to say hesitantly that I am not, neither have I written much on school processes. My work has been in teacher education, higher education and curriculum. For the past several years,

my links with school have diminished further, having been consumed by administration and that too in higher education. But, I have observed a variety of school situations—urban and rural, government and private, mainstream and alternative—in various parts of India, although always as an outsider. And I have been a parent, and quite a difficult experience that was, I can tell you in private. I also have vivid memories of my own school days, in a government school in a small, non-descript district town in Kerala.

I want to believe therefore that it is the distance that I have maintained from school that has enabled me to share my thoughts with you this morning, and I want to believe that this distance gives me a perspective. It is like this: when we are immersed in a work situation, when what we do is almost like second nature to us, we tend to not even notice what we are doing. We are like the fish that hardly knows the presence of water. However much stylized and unnatural school practices may appear to someone not socialized in them, our schools are so much normalized that we do not find anything odd in them. I think it will be interesting for us to imagine how a person socialized in a world that has no school would think when she comes to our world and sees some of our schools! They may appear highly unnatural. It is therefore necessary for us to create situations such as the present one, when we try and look at our own practices and see ourselves from a distance, we must act as though we are seeing them for the first time. We will then begin to see things more distinctly and clearly. The out-of-the-ordinary would then begin to stand out clearly in the ambience of elements that would otherwise appear to us to be normal and natural. This is what native ethnographers do. When they are doing ethnographic studies in their own contexts, there is a certain amount of training that needs to be done. So, I think that is what all of us need to practice.

Let me first of all set the boundary for this talk. In this talk, I will refer to ‘fear’ in a broad sort of way. I will not try and draw fine distinctions between categories like fear, anxiety and discomfiture, wariness, etc. I will treat fear as an inclusive category connoting all these shades of difficult emotions. Second, I will try and raise questions. But, I may not have answers to most of them. Yet, I think it is important to raise them, for they

may prove to be triggers for a reflective process in which you would bring forth your rich experiences and some real, useful insights may emerge. Third, I will refer to school as a generic category of institutions set in specific social and historical contexts. The particular context I am talking about is contemporary India, and that too the school system which is catering to the middle class. They will be described as tied firmly to the social structures and as meant to perform certain kinds of functions. What I am acutely aware of is the fact that most of you here represent school cultures that have defied these deterministic structures, hardwired into the genetic makeup of school, and have created strong counter currents. But then, you are the exception that proves the rule. I refer to schools in general in contemporary India. I do not refer to those schools like CFL that demonstrate the desirability and feasibility of alternative visions and paths. These are just caveats, because as you will empathize with me, I need to have an escape door kept ajar to get out when I find myself clearly out of depth!

The theme of the conference raises the question of the centrality of fear in school cultures. What seems to be implied is that fear is an aberration and an anomaly in the context of school. But, it is perhaps necessary for us to ask at the outset, whether fear is indeed an aberration or an anomaly. Is it the case that school practices in their original form were devoid of the element of fear, and that when they became corrupted over time, the element of fear crept in surreptitiously at some point through the backdoor? Or on the other hand, is it that fear was always an essential ingredient of school? This is something we may want to reflect on. Here is a second set of questions. Is fear a totally negative emotion? Is fear to be eschewed altogether? Is it a desirable objective to bring up the young as totally fearless? On the other hand, does fear have its utility? Has fear anything to do with learning to avoid that which is undesirable, perhaps essential to learn to survive?

Now, what is a most apt metaphor for schooling, forestry or horticulture? Forestry allows for everything to grow, natural eco-systems where species compete with one another, and a natural order prevails where some species dominate over the others. Horticulture, on the other hand, involves selective nurture. There is an order of things, not necessarily the natural order, and that determines what is considered desirable and what is not.

Horticulture is about providing conditions for the desirables to grow and thrive, pruning and trimming them as they grow and weeding out the undesirables. I consider that school as we understand it today is more like tending a garden than raising a forest. Do you agree?

The large body of work over the past 50 years by critical sociologists tells us that schooling is largely about maintaining the social order. It is a social contrivance for enculturation of the young to fall in line with the social norms prevalent. It's also about contained discord. Discord is allowed, but it has to be within the larger scheme of things. It's like this: if you want to be mad, you better behave in the prescribed or socially sanctioned manner. Schooling is largely geared to preparing the young to participate in the market economy, as part of the workforce and as consumer. Schooling is about sorting and selecting. In a society as incredibly unequal as India, schooling is a device around which consensus is sought to be built about who will legitimately be located in which social position. Schooling is a device to normalize inequality, to make it appear as natural and legitimate. The question as to who will get to go to which kind of school and through differential channels of schooling, who will eventually get prepared for which social position is addressed through the concept of meritocracy. Meritocracy is a very problematic category. It is made to appear as though it is given, it is natural and self explanatory, which it is not.

Let me now go to the next section. I am actually presenting the case as glimpses of various issues and each one I think could probably be taken up at some point of time during the next four days or at the end of this session for some discussion. Let me talk about the most important elephant in this room: *examination*. Examination is the central axle around which the entire armature of schooling revolves. It punctuates every learning event. It rewards, it punishes and it constantly coaxes and pushes everybody to keep pace with the rest. It also garners support from the parents and family to back-stop and push the child from the home front. It provides steam to the entire schooling operation. The conventional wisdom is that we test what the child learns. But the oppressive influence that examination exerts on schooling has reversed this maxim. The child is made to learn what he will be tested on. All this culminates in the mother of all examinations—the

class XII Board exams—and the entrance tests to the various streams of higher education. The entire schooling right from the primary classes is located within the gravitational field of this set of school-end entrance examinations. I used to think of this image of Halley's Comet, which comes from the outer rims of the solar system, and as it approaches the Sun, it develops a tail. And I always feel that as the child gravitates towards this final examination, she also develops a tail. After Class 8 to Class 9, the child takes a different form altogether. Then, she is the focus of a whole lot of expectations from all us. Performance in Class XII Board and the various entrance examinations is a make-or-break game for children particularly of middle class families where the stakes are very high. There is enormous pressure on the child to perform. Her entire sense of self-worth is hinged on her ability to perform in these examinations.

“Teach him to learn to lose, and also enjoy winning” – Abraham Lincoln is said to have written this to his son's teacher. I am sure he did not, but that is what is being said. But, it is a beautifully crafted letter whoever has written it. In contemporary India, Lincoln would have found himself quite out of place! Most parents and most schools would not teach a child to learn to lose. So much so, that the moment the young person faces the first setback in her life, she would not know how to deal with it. Often, the fear of low performance in the examination has a great deal to do with the anxiety of falling in the eyes of parents, teachers and losing face in front of peers. These other-oriented concerns are much more fearful and murky, stronger than those concerning self.

For parents, children become a narcissistic extension of themselves, the perfect child integral to their self-esteem and social standing. Not only must the child match what her parents have achieved, she must also achieve what they could not. In other words, vested in her is the responsibility of completing her parents' incomplete lives and living their fantasies. This is a tall order and extremely unfair too. This amounts to enormous pressure on the child. She feels she has never to let her parents down, and if she ever does, she has to live with too much guilt. Some years back, I happened to watch a TV talk show in a regional language, just prior to the school-final board exam results. A young woman was narrating a

particularly heart-wrenching experience she had gone through when she was at school. She had in fact stood among the first ten in her state board examination. But her mother was hoping that she would be the first. Her mother was so disappointed about her not getting the first rank, that she took her own life. This young woman says that even after many years after this shattering experience, she still cannot live even for a moment without reliving that experience of horror and the deepest sense of guilt she feels for letting her mother down. No doubt, this narrative represents an extreme and perhaps a rare situation. But, it starkly presents before us the pathological desperation with which at times parents hold the whole meaning of their lives at stake in the 'successes' of their children. Extending the plea Lincoln makes, I would go to the extent of saying that the lesson on how to accept failure would be more useful to parents than to the child.

The child often imbibes the narcissistic injuries of her parents and lives out their fears and needs. She unwittingly becomes an extension of her parents. School unfortunately does little to counter this. On the other hand, school is an accomplice to the family to keep the pressure on the child. Fear is used as a way to ensure compliance by school as well as by parents. Fear of abandonment, fear of rejection, fear of loss of love, fear of embarrassment, fear of falling in the eyes of significant adult figures, fear of losing face and so on. Between the enterprise of school and parents, the enterprise of being a child is sadly lost.

John Holt, the author of two highly influential books, 'How Children Fail' and 'How Children Learn', argues that children fail primarily because a. they are afraid, b. they are bored and c. they are confused. Schools promote an atmosphere of fear—fear of failure, fear of humiliation, fear of disapproval—that most severely affects a student's capacity for intellectual growth. About boredom, he says that schools demand that children perform repetitive tasks that make limited demands on their wide range of capabilities. Such demands may or may not be suitable to a particular child's interest or needs. About confusion, he says that by being caught between contradictory ethos of home and school, or between the various components of school itself, the child is confused. In fact, in my opinion, all the three—fear, boredom and confusion—are mutually complementary.

Let me bring in another author. John Taylor Gatto, the much acclaimed New York teacher and author, has written on the hidden curriculum in compulsory schooling. He talks of seven lessons universally taught, that form (according to him) the national (or probably an international) curriculum. The seven lessons are:

- Confusion: teaching ‘unrelating’ of everything. Accepting confusion as one’s destiny
- Class position: accepting that everyone has a proper place in the pyramid
- Indifference: not to care about anything too much
- Emotional dependence: surrendering one’s will to a pre-destined chain of command.
- Intellectual dependence: learning to wait for an expert to tell you what to do.
- Provisional self esteem: learning that one’s self respect depends on how the various assessments and evaluations would rate one from time to time.
- And finally, that you can’t hide: learning to live with the truth that you are constantly under surveillance.

In the contemporary Indian context, what is our notion of a ‘good school’? What is our notion of a ‘successful’ school graduate? What is the residual learning from school after every substantial element from the curriculum is forgotten? According to me, the successful product from a so- called good school will have the following abilities:

1. Ability to commit large chunks of unconnected, incoherent information to short-term memory. Ability not to waste time looking for meaningful connections and coherence.
2. Ability to drill unthinkingly, that is, tenaciously and unquestioningly engage with tedious and boring tasks.
3. Ability to crack speed tests with quick and unthinking application of algorithms. (That is what IIT coaching centres say: *don’t waste your time thinking*. When you attempt the IIT entrance examination, you should ensure that you don’t waste your time thinking. Because there is negative marking, you only attempt those items that you have

already drilled and committed to your memory, algorithms need to be applied, that's all.)

4. Readiness to accept authority and given knowledge (skepticism is often overrated). Ability to refrain from wasting time by questioning.
5. Ability to conform and please those who matter. An attitude of seeking approval always, and accepting oneself only conditional on approval by those who matter.
6. Ability to be fiercely, unrepentantly competitive.
7. An attitude of self absorption without letting oneself be distracted by softer emotions like empathy and compassion.

This might seem to be a caricature, and I agree that this has been profiled in that manner. Yet I want to ask ourselves this question: are there elements of truth in this profile of a successful product of a good school? And has this profile anything to do with the kind of larger social problems that we witness today in India? Does the profile of a person 'schooled to succeed' inhere something fundamentally fragile?

I will give you an example. There was this Indian family in California. This person was an IIT graduate, and he went to a reputed American university for higher studies and eventually became an investment person. He experienced his first major loss with the recession and meltdown some time in 2007-08 and did not know how to cope with it. So, guess what? He killed his family and himself. It is an illustration of the earlier point that I was trying to make, that we have trained people so well to succeed, that they are totally clueless as to how to cope with a loss or a setback when they face one.

There are umpteen examples of 'successful' graduates of 'good' schools becoming terrible husbands, wives and parents, terrible friends, colleagues and neighbours and terrible citizens. I think the reasons for this also need to be looked at much more closely. There are still a few in our society who ask questions, who dare to rock the boat, who help effect major transformations, who create beauty, who pursue truth, etc. But, don't you think they happen in spite of school? This is another question I would like you to address.

School is a highly stylized and unnatural setting both in terms of physical and social architecture of classrooms. It leaves both teachers and students somewhat in a state of discomfiture. In fact, it is believed that a certain amount of discomfiture is a necessary ingredient for growth. You have to constantly keep people in a state of discomfiture, then only they will perform optimally, so believe many management experts.

Isca Salzberger-Wittenberg (who is a clinical psychologist) in the book 'Emotional Experience of Learning and Teaching' talks at length about the complex student-teacher relationship. According to Wittenberg, student-teacher relationship evokes a bit of fear in both students and teachers. The student's fear arises out of her expectations of the teacher as a source of knowledge and wisdom, as a provider and comforter. As a result, the teacher becomes an object of both admiration and envy. Teacher's attributed role as an authoritarian figure and a judge causes anxiety and fear, and consequentially create a relationship of love and hate.

There are also unresolved issues that characterize the child's relationship with her parents, and other significant adults outside of school, that spill over to her relationship with the teacher. Children often bring along to the classroom familial distress. Divorces, abuse, difficult family dynamics, illness among caregivers, violence, preoccupied or distracted parents and such. There is often an expectation by the child for the teacher to compensate for an absent or dysfunctional parent. These are difficult expectations. Disappointment on this account of course would be a cause for further distress for the child.

For the teacher, too, this relationship is a potential source of fear – fear of criticism, fear of hostility, fear of losing control. This may particularly be true for teachers of higher grades. There are also unresolved issues from teacher's own childhood, and relationships with her own parents, that spill over into her relationship with her students. Sometimes, these may manifest in terms of hostility and rivalry with students' parents and in terms of regressive behaviour. According to Wittenberg, jealousy, rivalry and bullying among students may also have something to do with the dynamics triggered off by the teacher's own unresolved psychological issues.

The insight we must take from Wittenberg is that there is a need to problematize teachers' life-space, her psychic world and, let me add, her social world as well; if we have to understand the emotional dynamics of school and students.

How to work on our learning about the emotional dynamics of school? How do we intervene to engage with fear and enable students to deal with it as they do with all other emotional states? The Krishnamurti schools have their ways. Other alternative schools have their own methodologies. I will not go into these. I hope the next four days will give us opportunities for sharing our experiences and learning from each other.

I'll end with the most impactful story I have heard as a child. This is a story that my father told me when I was in the primary classes. It's a tragic story of Bhaskara. Bhaskara was a brilliant student studying in a *gurukula*. He excelled in every subject that was taught by his teacher and he promptly and successfully completed every task that had been given to him. He was in fact learning much more advanced lessons in comparison to his peers. Everybody considered Bhaskara to be a prodigy. But his teacher was always harsh and somewhat disapproving of him. Often, he punished and scolded Bhaskara very harshly even for minor mistakes. Bhaskara was loved and cared for by everybody in the *gurukula*, but the only person from whom Bhaskara yearned for some approval was forever disapproving and harsh. Bhaskara could not quite understand this. He was confused and he was deeply sad. Gradually his sadness gave way to intense emotions of anger and hatred. So, one day, he decided to kill his teacher. With that intention, he climbed onto the roof above the teacher's bedchamber carrying a heavy stone with him and was preparing to drop it on his teacher when he was asleep. When he was sitting there waiting for his teacher to fall asleep, he overheard the conversation between his teacher and his wife. The *guru-patni* was asking her husband why he was always harsh and seemingly unkind to Bhaskara. The teacher then said that of all the students he has ever had in his *gurukula*, Bhaskara was the most brilliant. He said it was his duty as a teacher to ensure that Bhaskara's brilliance was nurtured to its fullest. For this, it was important that Bhaskara should not ever be overconfident about

his abilities. Bhaskara had to strive harder and harder to bring out his full potential and that was why the teacher was seemingly harsh on Bhaskara. Hearing this, Bhaskara shed tears of joy, sadness and deep repentance. He fell at the feet of his teacher and confessed about the most heinous crime he was about to commit. He wanted to be punished as per the *shastras* for the attempted *guru-hatya*. And it was ordained by the *shastras* that even contemplating a *hatya* was as bad as actually executing it. The teacher said that Bhaskara could be condoned because of his repentance. But Bhaskara would have none of it. He therefore voluntarily accepted his punishment, a slow and painful death. In his death, Bhaskara composed a poem a *Shatakam*, a string of a hundred magnificent *shlokas*. But death embraced him before he could complete the hundredth *shloka*. Because of that one incomplete poem that he composed, the only one he ever did in his lifetime, Bhaskara is known even today as Bhaskara Kavi.

Now, this was a story that my father told me when I was in Class IV I think. I do not recall the context in which he told this story. I have no idea, what message he wanted to convey to me. But, the impact that it had on me was enormous. I was never the same after that. To this day, this one story leaves me shaken much more than any other.

I must say that my intention was to give somewhat a stark picture so that it would provoke a discussion. So, if it appeared to be too stark, forgive me.

I want to tell you another story. And this one is a happier one, I assure you! When we were young and at school, there used to be a periodic smallpox vaccination programme. The health visitors would come to our school (ours was a government school). All of us used to line up for the smallpox vaccination. I remember every time this happened, I used to try and be the first to go because I wanted to be done with it. The fear of having to go through it was more difficult than the actual pain. I feel quite like that now. You asked me to give this first key note address, and I think I can relax for the rest of the time. I don't have to fear that my turn is going to come next and what will I say, what will I do? It's over and done with!



Questions and answers

Questions on corporal punishment and parents' endorsement of it

A: About this harshness, I have seen it in North India particularly. There was this show that came on the Whatsapp the other day that said there was hardly any Punjabi boy who had not been hit by his father, that belief was that he had to be taught in that manner, toughened in that manner. A lot of that eventually manifests itself in terms of the kind of irregularities and other kinds of problems that men show in later years; lack of sensitivity and so on. Many times I really feel that domestic violence and other kinds of violence in the society has a lot to do with the way the boys are particularly brought up. When you talk about children, that is particularly the case in large school systems. In the US of course every public school system has this problem, and Gatto writes about this in *Teacher's Fear*. He is talking about his experience from the Brooklyn City school systems where even to discipline and to get students into the class on time itself is a big task. But in India, from whatever little I have seen, it is a bit different in government schools. It is perhaps more applicable to large private schools, where

kids, particularly in senior secondary classes are a law unto themselves and teachers have very little control and there is a certain social distance between the teachers and students, students coming from backgrounds of relatively greater affluence.

Two kinds of social distances are there. One is in MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) schools where the poorest of the poor children in Delhi go for primary education. Ten years ago, I remember a teacher telling me, “They make so much ruckus, there is no way to control but to beat them. The thing is I can’t even beat them, because they are so dirty.” She was saying this in all candour and sincerity. She herself was clearly from the middle class and her own children didn’t study in MCD schools. That is one kind of social distance. Another kind is much more in elite schools where the students are from a much higher social class background compared to the teachers. Either way, I think this affects the dynamic that exists between the teachers and students, and this is true particularly in the secondary and senior secondary schools.

Questions about adults being overly watchful of children

A: About treating kids with kid gloves, I really don’t know. I wish I could tell you. I have been a quite an imperfect parent. I have never been a school teacher. So, I really wouldn’t be able to say anything authentic. I can only say that there are a whole lot of unsatisfactory scenes we see around with regard to the way children are treated. This whole emphasis of child being the nucleus, the focus of the family, I think is not doing children any good. Many of my colleagues, particularly in recent years, they take childcare leave, and this is a new thing introduced by Chidambaram in 2008 before the elections because they wanted to get the women’s support. This enables women employees in the government to take as long as two years’ paid childcare leave. And the child is defined as anybody less than 18. So, it usually happens that the mother is on childcare leave for two years when the child is in the 10th standard. My heart goes out to the child. The child is in such a pathetic situation. Being constantly breathed down her neck by the mother. Here, the child becomes the mother’s project.

Intentions are always good. I just mentioned this to illustrate your point. I can't say anything on this with authenticity. When I talked about the Halley's comet, in fact I should have said that the whole family grows a tail. That's when the TV channels are stopped, they suddenly become home-oriented and the whole family goes into the rhythm of the drill that the child is subjected to. I know a family where the child comes back from school and is too tired now to do any work. So, the child lies down and the mother reads to the child. It is constantly in the air, by sheer osmosis he learns because it is all around him. I am not particularly sure what kind of grotesque product comes out of this process; four years of the most formative period in a child's life being spent in the most unnatural manner. They get vitamin D deficiency first of all, they don't expose themselves to enough sunlight.

Apart from that, the whole routine is about this one task of combating Class XII examinations and the IIT entrance. Statistics tell us that about three and a half or four lakh students participate in IIT exams. There are only 6000 students in all the IITs put together. So, the probability of them getting in, in any case is very low. So, what do people do after that? What kind of wrecks have they become? The industry vs. inferiority conflict continues unresolved for many years.

Q: If we are looking at a global market, today schools are completely related to jobs. This leads to insecurity because we also have had policies making sure everybody goes through education (like Compulsory Education, Right to Education), so that higher education is more accessible to many people today than before. So, my concern is that, let us say, we take even an alternate school that takes care of emotional needs and well-being, but as you said the 12th standard when they go out of school, I feel there is a lot of confusion. It is not what career they choose, there is a loss of identity I feel. I am curious about what colleges and universities are doing in that area. It seems a reality that suddenly exams become very important and it seems a reality that even if you are deeply passionate and sensitive and you want to explore openly, what is the scope you see in our Indian milieu?

A: Minor correction on this particular point, that opportunities for higher

education are much more today. It is not entirely correct. There is an enormous expansion in school education. The proportion of people accessing higher education is proportionately still low. Very few people access good higher education even now. That is one.

Higher education was more a select kind of enterprise earlier and there was a certain homogeneity in terms of quality earlier. This was the case with school education as well. I studied in the 1960s in Kerala. There were at that time only government schools or government aided schools. I studied in a government school. There were no private, fee-charging schools at that time. Then, there was a proliferation of schools—CBSE schools came into existence—and that coincided with the emergence of the new middle class. (I always used to think that Maruti 800 and CBSE were emblems of the emergence of the new middle class.) That rendered the government schools in a very difficult situation, in the sense that, the middle class abandoned government schools in a big way. That is not only true with schooling, it is also true with the health system and other public systems. When the middle class abdicates the public system, you always find that there is no possibility of quality negotiations. So, the quality came down in the government systems altogether, whether education or health.

The distinction in the 1960s was between those who could go to school and those who could not. The boundary of social stratification lay parallel to the school boundary wall. The well-to-do were inside and the less well-to-do were outside. Today, I think the school system has expanded considerably. But it has got differentiated dramatically. So, the question is no more who goes to school and who does not, but who goes to which kind of school. That has become the most important question. The same is the case with higher education. In a city like Delhi for example, 1.5 lakh students pass out of class XII every year. Now, Delhi University has got in its undergraduate colleges put together, a capacity of about 40,000 to 50,000, something like that. So, there is a yawning gap. Not that the rest of them don't have opportunities. Delhi University itself has got a correspondence course which has a capacity of something like 2 lakhs. So, everybody can get into it. But, people do not want it. So, it is not like people do not want to have access to

any kind of higher education. They want a higher education which has a demonstrable and functional relation with the job market. Access without a perceived notion of quality has no sense. That is the situation.

But this whole regime of exam writing relaxes a little bit once they come into higher education, liberal studies particularly, but even in premier technological institutions. Late Professor Indiresan who used to be Director, IIT Madras once said that once someone gets into IIT after so much of effort for several years, he becomes relaxed. IIT students are not in any case much seriously interested in engaging with the branch of engineering that they are specializing in. Because they are eventually going to sell soap and shampoo. So, why should they learn more of the technicalities of the branch? So, they take it easy, give the minimum performance expected of them and get out. Very few people are really interested in engineering and get into higher studies in the sciences and engineering. So, there is a sudden relaxation after class XII. The pent up energy of 4-5 years gets suddenly released and they really can't gather that, and there is no childcare leave and no mothers to be with them. So, it looks difficult for them to cope, particularly in hostel or paying guest situations. It is worth studying this phenomenon. I don't think we have enough studies on the exact nature of the processes that go into some of these elite institutions. It is worth studying.

But, in the liberal studies, I know for a fact that this whole regime of writing exams, preparing for exams actually gets relaxed. The undergraduate students here can correct me if I am wrong. Undergraduate studies are much more relaxed than schooling, although the amount of writing they have to do must be much more. That is true with many good liberal studies education today. But I don't know if that answered your question.

Q: Thanks for this exchange. I have something to share. But, I'd just like your response to it. At a conference in Cochin, there was a government school teacher who spoke rather poignantly. She said, "I have been teaching in school, the government wants me to teach through activities in junior school. They do not want me to fail children and now they don't want me to punish them. And now they are saying they want to remove exams till senior school. The children are not frightened. What can I do? They have

taken every power I have from me.” These are classes of 60 or so. So, is it just a number problem or what is it? I am curious.

Q: Children will only learn when they are afraid. They do not learn, they do not work if they are not afraid of something. If I make them stand out of the classroom and if I say, “I will beat you if you don’t do this by tomorrow,” then only the children will learn. Most of the teachers believe in frightening the children. So, how to bring a shift from this? Actually, only 5% of the teachers will not be of this mindset. So, how to make a shift in the teachers’ mindset?

Q: I am working with government school teachers. Recently, I went through the Rajasthan government’s transfer policy for teachers. So, this policy says there will be category of schools A, B, C, D and these categories are based on geography and how far they are from the tehsil head quarters, approach road and all that. And this policy defines that if 80% of the students are getting C grade, the teacher will be transferred to D grade schools. So, all this is punishment policy actually. So, if the teacher is governed by such policies, then what happens? This is a chain reaction. You are punishing a teacher for bad result, poor results of students. So, what will he do then? This is seen in the classroom again.

Teacher says ‘No love without fear’. Many teachers say, there have been stories, they got the punishment and ultimately that resulted in their achievement. So they always say they have this empathy towards this teacher who always punished them, who created this fear in their lives so that they got some achievement. And that is why they say this is our responsibility to mould the child into responsible citizen. Therefore we should teach that, we should teach this, hammering should be there.

So, I see all these like the chain reaction from government to teacher to the students and this is all going on. This fear is visible in all strata.

A: There was the DPEP programme in the ’90s if you recall, and that was the time when selected districts that were educationally backward were identified and access related measures were taken, while also looking at quality in terms of curriculum, textbook and pedagogy. Kerala was

supposed to be one of those states where the quality parameters were supposedly implemented effectively, successfully. I happened to do a case study of one of those districts, Wayanad. And it was interesting that in the '90s there was a major exodus from government schools to private schools. There were a lot of private schools mushrooming at that time. Parents of the aspirant middle class withdrew their kids from government schools and put them in private schools. Government of Kerala of course gave an explanation for the dwindling enrollment in government schools, saying that it was a reflection of the effective family planning policy – there were fewer children in the school going age. The enrollment has come down because the population count itself has shrunk.

But, the fact was not that at all. It was the exodus that happened. There was a feature film made in Malayalam called DPEP, and it was not a documentary! Parody and spoofing, making fun of DPEP and the major butt of ridicule was the *nachna gaana* pedagogy. They said: Why is it that our children have to go through these so-called child-friendly classrooms where there is no regime of multiplication tables and dictations, and all that is attributed to good schooling, according to prevalent notions of good schooling. Why for our children and not for yours, was the question they were asking the upper middle-class who were sending their children to the so-called better private schools. It is very clear that child-friendly practices will have some impact only in those places where there is no tangible, visible middle-class presence seen in the school system, in rural areas particularly. It may not work in a place like Kerala because there are tangible benefits that they see happening to children who go to schools where there is a recitation of rhymes, multiplication tables and so on. Admittedly, the child-friendly pedagogy develops fearlessness among children. But, what use is fearlessness, according to these parents, if their children can't fare well in higher learning and employment later?

I am reminded of a note written by Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s. It was in his prison notes. It is a critique of Mussolini's educational reforms at that time, which actually sought to create a child-friendly environment in schools attended by children from the working class. What Gramsci said was very interesting. He said (I am paraphrasing this) "We really need to

master those aspects of the elite schooling through which we can compete with them. We can't be satisfied with anything that is specially made for us. We need to beat them in their own game." That was his point. Invariably that was also the kind of point which these parents of children from poor families were expressing to us at that time. "Why do we have to send them to government school at all if it is just *nachna gaana*?' So, enterprising teachers actually used to do both. They would do a certain kind of teaching for the sake of their DPEP inspectors, and certain other kinds of traditional schooling to cater to the interest of the parents. They were actually living in both the worlds. In the morning, they were singing, dancing, telling stories. Afternoons, they usually became strict.

What you said is very correct again. When the 2005 NCF came into existence, social constructivism was considered to be the ruling philosophy through which curriculum needed to be transacted. What really escaped everybody's attention was the fact that this decision, that this has to be done through social constructivism, was actually thrust from above. So, there was no constructivism in which teachers themselves participated. For the teacher, it was a fiat that she received and she has to then create a democratic atmosphere inside her classroom. So, the very idea that a democratic environment had to be created in a classroom was dictatorially thrust on the teachers. This approach has its contradictions. You are right in saying that we need to look at these things comprehensively. Actually, this is not restricted to government schools alone. In fact, there is a clear tendency in private schools to look at teachers' labour as 'intensive labour'. If you can do 'n' number of things in 'X' hours, you must make teachers do '2n' number of things in 'X' hours so that the day is packed with activities and there is no time for thinking. Again the same principle. The teachers should abandon reflection, thinking, etc. That seems to be the policy that everybody seems to be happy about, and a polity which is becoming increasingly undemocratic will naturally need a school system of this kind. So, I don't see a contradiction between the larger politics of this country and the kind of school system that we seem to be shaping.

Q: Sometime back I think one of the things said was 'Is fear necessary?' During the course of one's life, education and so on, you do come to

recognize that certain amount of fear is useful in life at least. You are afraid of snakes, or getting hit by a bus and you don't step out. But, the question to you is, if fear as a motivator is necessary in the education system, and in life as well. Because we don't distinguish between the two. I think maybe it is oversimplifying it a bit. But, mostly when people speak about fear as being unnecessary or bad in a school system, I think they are referring to fear as a motivator. So, posing it that way, I ask you to respond to that.

Q: I studied in a private school. Somewhere, they did not give us opportunity to speak in the classroom. Even now my heart is beating to speak in front of you. With much difficulty, I am asking you a question Sir. For the past 8 years I have been working as government school teacher. Even when I was studying also they were saying that India is a developing nation. I accepted, maybe after 10 years it will be a developed nation. Now, I am teaching my students that it is a developing nation and I get students from worst families. It is not improving. But, coming to education, students do not have fear because of us teachers. Our hands are tied, our mouths are closed. The only reason is compulsory education should be given to the students. They have to be passed till the age of 14. So, at the end of the examination, we make our students to copy. If we do not do this, the burden will fall on us in some other way. Being middle class workers, we have to manage both family and even the school, Sir. We can't leave work and we have to satisfy at work. So, students lose fear. They feel 'they will make us copy and we can pass the exam'.

I am now coming to the private schools, Sir. My children have lot of fear, lot of burden, pressure. Average human life is becoming shorter. We are running behind something, earning money and everything. India being spiritual, students are taught about spirituality in class. I am here today, give me some tips on how I can develop some fear in my students in classes and how can I reduce or overcome my own fears and in my children as well Sir? Also, my children going to private school, these schools are just accepting money, they are lynching us, they are not giving good education. Rabindranath Tagore said 'nature will make the students learn'. India being a spiritually rich nation, why are there so many poor children, poor people and so much poverty? At the same time, there are so many rich

people in India. And although school education is compulsory for children, I see many children out of school, falling prey to smoking and other abuses. There are no reforms in education. Please give me some points that can satisfy me so that I can go back and work in my school and at home.

A: I think you made a good presentation! These are not issues that have ready solutions. If they were, then we would have solved them long ago. All I can say is this about this whole notion of development that you mentioned. When there are the homeless and destitute in every town and there are children out of school, on the street and there is abject poverty, there is no point in deluding ourselves that we are anywhere near development. That we are moving towards development needs to be looked at much more critically. And I think government schools are playing an important role in it to provide access to so many children, even though you say you have no control over them. But the very idea that they are accessing school, in my opinion is a very important first step.

A student of mine teaches in a Municipal Corporation of Delhi School, he has a class of 60. A colleague of his manages the other division. If she is on leave, then he has to manage both the divisions – about 120 children. So, teaching is a far cry, there is hardly any teaching that is possible. He himself says, all that he actually manages to do is to ensure in as humane a manner as possible that they are kept in and not let out into the street where there is traffic and they can be run over by vehicles. So, to just ensure their safety and ensure that they are more or less entertained is all that we can do. But I do think that it is important for us to consider even that as a very important first step. Government school system needs much more resources. There should be more teachers and more effective teaching and learning can happen only that way. But, I think you are doing a wonderful job, being there and catering to those students who have nowhere to go. In remote rural areas in UP and Bihar I have seen girls sent to government schools and boys sent to private schools. I am not particularly sure that those private schools (in those semi-urban or rural areas, these private schools come up in make-shift premises and with untrained and ill-paid teachers), are any superior to the government schools. But, all the same, what happens is that they are engaged in something and there is

some English and some mathematics that happens there. That's about all. Very minimum. So, I think it is important for us to learn to rethink on our strategies of public education.

I have nothing to tell you. In fact, I have lots of things to listen from you. Because you seem to be having very authentic and strong views on some of these things. I am really confused about spirituality. I really don't know what kind of spirituality is actually possible. But we should be talking about it. Many times, I am quite undecided as to where we must begin. Like Vivekananda said, to a hungry man, a piece of bread is God. So, I am sure that these are things you may want to share in the next 3 days.

Q: I am from Drishya Kalika Kendra. We are working with poor children. We are all worried with the teaching and learning of subjects like science, mathematics, social studies etc. We are not thinking of what else we can do; other skills like pottery, weaving, embroidery or any local handicrafts. If we visit our villages, pottery is forgotten. China plastic has replaced it. We are scaring our children and creating atmospheres where they fear. Everyone has to become engineers and doctors or go to IITs. Where are potters and weavers now? Our silk is replaced by china silk. Why are we not teaching this in our schools to children?

A: Well, I agree. It will be good for us if we do not fall into the 'solution trap' in these four days. Let us not try to find solutions. Let us formulate problems clearly. That in my opinion is a very important first step. Because everything cannot have solutions immediately. Solutions will probably have to be evolved through processes, which I am sure all of you are engaged in. That is what reflective professional practice is all about. So, I don't think a conference like this is really equipped to come up with solutions to complex problems. At best what we can do is actually to formulate it as sharply as possible, try and understand some underlying dynamics behind a manifest problem and see relationships between various kinds of problems or issues that people raise. I think if that can be achieved in these four days, that is a great thing.



Greeting his pupils, the teacher asked:
What would you learn of me?
And the reply came:
How shall we care for our bodies?
How shall we rear our children?
How shall we live and work together?
How shall we play?
For what ends shall we live?
And the teacher pondered these words,
And sorrow was in his heart,
For his own learning touched not these things.

Quoted in What's the Point of School? by Guy Claxton, 2008

This talk is about our understanding of fear and learning, and CFL's work in the area of education over the last 25 years.

The talk itself is going to be in three parts, by three of us working at CFL. The first part is by me, Krishna: I work here. The second part is by Rupa,

and the third part by Shashi. Before we begin, a few things we wanted to share (and I promise we didn't write this down after the morning talk by Professor Shyam Menon! I noticed he said exactly the same things we wanted to say).

Firstly, the word 'fear' and the way we are using the word. In this presentation, the word fear is used to mean a whole spectrum of feelings like anxiety, lingering worry and other similar feelings that are impediments to easy functioning and distressful to experience.

Many of us here today come from varied backgrounds and life conditions, so some of the things we say may not be relevant in exactly the same way to all school environments. Nevertheless, the conversations in the days to come will hopefully have something we can all reflect upon together and take home some insights from.

Much of what we share about CFL's work are our experiments in education. None of it is meant to be prescriptive. We are not telling you what to do. So please forgive us if by mistake there is some tone somewhere saying this is what you must do. We don't intend that.

We are going to share some of our experiments with organising our school. We have more questions than answers often. This conference is not about prescribing our methods to you all! We truly hope to have conversations around the theme with all of you in the next few days.

How we came about the theme of the conference

In our brainstorming session, while we were looking for a theme for this conference, we asked what is relevant to all schooling today. Is there anything we can talk about that is common to most schools, something about school cultures, feelings that school cultures in general provoke in students? It seemed to us that fear is the dominant mood of school cultures. Fear that is built into the very system of the school and its workings. Fear has become an integral part of a child's experience of school, often used by the adults to manage children "for their own good"!

Hence the theme, Worlds of Fear: School Cultures.

School as a place for learning

I want to share a little bit about the idea of school, something that we have been thinking about a little bit. I want to start with one of my favourite comic strips from one of my favourite artists, Bill Watterson.

(The cartoon depicts a conversation between Calvin and his teacher Miss Wormwood. Calvin demands to know how his education is preparing him for the 21st century: is he getting the skills to compete effectively, and will he get a high paying job? Miss Wormwood responds by suggesting that Calvin work harder, because “what you get out of school depends on what you put into it.” Calvin is despondent!)

The English word school apparently comes from the Greek *skhole* to mean leisure, philosophy, a lecture place. It seems to have a mood of lightness, of freedom to engage and learn. Free time and leisure are possibly not the first words that come to mind when students think of school, unfortunately! Maybe this leisure is not about ‘not doing anything’. Leisure could be looked upon as the freedom from stress, having the time and psychological space to learn something well.

I remember my school days fairly vividly. There was neither psychological time nor space to learn most of the things we were meant to learn inside the classroom. I did learn a lot of things outside the classroom. But we won't go into that. While I didn't experience any traumatic punishment at school, the lingering fear of teachers and parents, how I came across to my peers, the fear of disapproval of bad performance, competition and consistent comparison, the insecurity of a future livelihood loomed large in my mind. I thought these were just my peculiar experience and frailty. I remember many of my classmates felt this way too. Looking back, I can now see how systemically this lingering nervousness was methodically fostered, by fairly well-meaning people! They didn't intend to hurt us. But that is how it happened. We started as enthusiastic children wanting to go to school in our early lives, because there were opportunities to play,

meet others, do exciting things. Then something strange seems to have happened along the way: I can't remember where it happened, how it happened. At some point, the school became the production house for churning out skilled employees for an industry I did not know anything about: training, preparing us individuals for a livelihood that was so often not any one of our dreams. We were just told that this is a better space to be in the future.

Don't mistake me: I don't think schools are terribly bad places. I think schools are generally good for humanity! We need lots more schools in the world, good ones, of all sizes. Not the kind that foster more anxiety towards life and living. I must say at this point, I do recognise that there are some schools experimenting with progressive fear-free education here and there in pockets, but schools on the whole have endorsed fear, becoming rather daunting spaces. And as Rajiv said this morning fear as a motivating factor is an important tool.

Some may feel schooling is not in a crisis, that there are many happy children, and that we are in a much better place than a hundred years ago. Well, our perception is slightly different: *this is not the whole scene*. We must account for the larger attitude, the philosophical confusion in these places called schools. And it is our responsibility as educators to do something about it.

School is not all about scholastic abilities of a student

School is a place where students begin to learn about friendship, life, love, sex, death and other important experiences to come. A school's curriculum cannot side-step learning about the learner, just as a teacher cannot teach without learning about the teacher. Every individual has a world within to unravel: a landscape of emotions that intricately weave themselves into our understanding and response to the world around. Can we observe this world carefully? We need to closely observe how fear paralyses and distorts relationships (for the student and for the adult) towards learning, towards the teacher, towards oneself, towards each other on a daily basis.

Some questions persist when we look at education and schools today.

How may we help school cultures to evolve?

Are we simply repeating what we were conditioned to do in our childhood?

Are we simply repeating what we were conditioned to do in our history as a nation?

Is schooling meant to be mere training, with mechanical drill work replacing intelligent learning?

Is all education about preparing individuals for a successful life ahead, helping them desperately to fit into a dominant social fabric?

We hope to probe into many of these questions in the days to come. Professor Menon has already started the reflection process I think and the talks by our speakers will throw light on many of these.

Our view

Whatever may be the current trend or national legacy, our philosophical starting point at CFL is *fear is detrimental to learning of any kind* and not just at schools. We, at CFL, do not systemically endorse or justify frightening students to learn. However, we cannot claim all our students experience a fear-free schooling. They are all sitting at the back, looking straight at me now! Shashi will speak more about how our children experience fear too.

Regardless of the claim that fear may be used effectively in schools, we see that fear distorts one's experience: it distorts one's relationship with oneself and the world. This conference is an exploration in this direction – to see how schools may be fear-less learning spaces for all involved. Rupa will speak about the work we are attempting in this school.

There seems to be some confusion with the use of the word fear. It is often also used to mean respect or reverence. The worry that I have heard is *if we remove fear, then they won't listen to us or do any work!* or *bhaya-bhakti illade iddare makkalu odalla, namma maathu kelalla!* We seem to fear some kind

of loss of control over children or students in the absence of fear in them. Keeping students scared so that they fulfill our expectations: this is not how we need to relate. Teach them more disrespect: that is not what we mean! We must discover ways of relating to each other that are respectful, but not fearful. We must discover how we encourage a student to respect and learn without fearing the teacher or the activity or the consequence of the activity.

So where can we begin? What does this mean for the adult?

We think changing adults' attitudes could be the beginning of a change in school cultures. I want to go back to the Calvin cartoon now. And if Bill Watterson and I had to chat about this, I would have asked him to change the third frame to: What students get out of school depends on what adults put into it!

Changing school cultures for adults

We at CFL don't believe a school is all about children and classes and exams. It is also about the adult learner called the teacher. So what is a teacher learning at school? Not just more and more about her subjects, but about the nature of relationships, about the nature of the world and about her place in all this as a teacher and a human individual. Can schools be fear-free spaces for adults first? The way we organise adults' lives in a school: how we treat each other as colleagues, how we treat the parents, how we treat children and students often gives away some of our operational attitudes. Can the spirit of working with each other (teachers, parents and students) be non-coercive, non-manipulative, non-hierarchical and non-judgemental?

What is the ultimate responsibility of a school?

I truly hope we all will feel that our responsibility is towards the individual learner and her inner and outer world. Our responsibility is towards creating a safer world ahead. I don't see how we can justify coercion and castigation, instilling fear through painful punishments, disciplining

through punitive regimentation and the likes, all in the name of effective schooling! I am sure it is effective, but that is not the effect I hope you want to have. Our abiding, long-term interest has to be the welfare of a learner even though fear may seem like an effective short-term motivator. Simply discarding externally imposed motivators like threats and rewards, and exploring intrinsic motivation in students seems intelligent to us.

Care for the young

When I think of what is this relation all about between adults and children, between teachers and students, for me, the basis of this relationship is care for the young. It is strange that school which is meant to be a place for caring for the young is also the site where all insecurities of the adult world plays out. Home and family, workplace and colleagues, society and nation are all the other sites this fear permeates our relationships with each other. School happens to be just one of these. Becoming aware of how our fears drive our actions and what it does to the school and the young is probably just the beginning of truly caring for the young.

We will need to start with some important reflections as adults and educators. What kind of an ethos of home and school are we creating? In what way does this ethos contain the seeds of fear? What are our attitudes towards learners? What are our aims for education? How far are we willing to go to make schools a safe learning place?



Krishna just spoke about the need for a culture of care in schools. Now I will share what seems most important in creating this culture.

Relationship

Here's a lovely comic strip that I enjoy a lot.

(This is a cartoon from a Peanuts series. Linus is worried his teacher doesn't like him anymore and that she looks through him in class. He is extremely sad and tense. Finally he discovers that she is looking through him because she is short-sighted, and he writes a letter of appreciation to her ophthalmologist!)

I wonder how many of our students worry about us in this way.

Openness in relationship between the adult and the student seems most important. It is the first step if we want to create a learning environment for children. This relationship needs to be caring, there must be affection and we need to be interested in children's lives. If there is no care, then I wonder on what ground the children will relate to adults. When children

feel secure in their relationship with adults, it feels like they will engage with us, and with learning, more deeply. We notice in our experience, that most often children cooperate cheerfully when they trust adults and feel secure.

In this relationship, there are undoubtedly many challenges we encounter. However, the fabric of trust is what supports us in meeting the challenges. CFL is a small school, we have only about 70- 75 children and about 20 adults. Certainly, the small numbers make it possible for us to be in touch with one another, to build personal relationships. Children, we think, feel comfortable and relate with ease with adults here. Humour plays an important role in relating with one another here. We tease each other, laugh at ourselves and others in a general atmosphere of lightness and affection.

Now, one may wonder how discipline is ensured, considering that children relate freely with adults here. Discipline is definitely an area that is given a lot of attention in many schools. Generally, children obey rules and conform to expected behaviour because they are scared of the consequences of breaking the rules. Actually what we would like here is for the children to be sensitive to the people around and to the spaces they occupy. We feel this does not come from establishing rigid rules of conduct. We do have norms that we abide by, but we have lots of conversations around them with the students. In working with children, we realise that they do have the capacity to understand how to respond to the people around in a sensitive and caring manner. Nurturing this capacity may be the key, instead of using fearful means.

Once we have in place a relationship of affection, we know that learning does not happen automatically. So what does learning entail? Motivation it seems is integral to this process. Children are curious learners and they are excited to learn too. Yet, adults have created many tools to motivate them.

Let's take a look at these aspects of schooling that induce fear and how we at CFL work with these. In our experience, motivation need not be fuelled by these factors. If I look at the common element in all these, it is fear. And fear has a tremendous impact on children. I will talk about each of these tools and the impact they have on children.

Rewards

Suppose we look at rewards. If a child performs well and you reward her, she feels good and feels motivated. But this is not the only psychological element at play. She may be feeling tense about not getting the reward the next time, and may be stressed about keeping up her rank. Also, when rewards are given, they are given for an end result and they don't acknowledge the effort of the child and the process of learning. So it becomes very uni-dimensional. When children are motivated from within by interest and curiosity, and then as a teacher if I attach a reward to that performance, then research shows that children actually become less interested in the activity. If a child does not show motivation to work, and reward is used, it is likely that the child becomes dependent on the reward to work.

Praise

Praise is rewarding. When I praise a child, I can be watchful, observe why I am praising. Is it to appreciate the effort or is it to get more work done? It is likely that children get hooked to praise and become dependent on it in order to work. So one of things we try is to qualify the praise -

Instead of simply saying *good job* or *well done*, I can say, "I see that you have taken care to organise your ideas well."

Punishments

Punishments are used in schools to push children to work harder or to change behaviour.

If as a teacher I punish a child, then this obviously has a damaging effect on the well-being of the child, even though the punishment gets the work done. Repeated punishment seems to induce a generalised feeling of anxiety and the child tends to become nervous. The children may work effectively out of fear, but their focus often becomes how to avoid the negative consequence rather than be interested in understanding and so, learning is compromised.

Here, when we need to address a concern we may have about a child, it is done based on the relationship I have with the child. Although children may be difficult, they are not unresponsive or antagonistic towards us. Suppose I notice that a child is rude in his comments to me. Sometimes even just sharing how I felt, to say, “Hey what you said was quite hurtful,” seems to make sense to the child enough to change his or her behaviour.

Competition and comparison

Often schools also use competition and comparison to make students perform “better.” It feels natural to compare ourselves with others. I seem to be doing it often even as an adult. But it leaves me feeling inadequate at times or even arrogant perhaps when I see that others are not doing as well as I am. Children too experience the same. It seems to be similar with competition, there is a feeling of being judged, pressure to do well, fear of losing, not living up to expectations. So for all these reasons, it makes sense to us that we don’t endorse these tools in working with children. We all know for example, how a games field can be a highly competitive space. Understanding this, we look carefully at how to keep the rigour in playing a game without encouraging aggressive competition. We learn to appreciate good skill that a friend may have on the games field, even though he may be in the opposite team!

At CFL we don’t consciously use rewards, punishments, competition, comparison. When you hear this, you may wonder if adults have any expectations at all! We do take rigour in work seriously. We do make demands of children. There are deadlines for assignments for example, or if we notice shabby work, we do ask them to redo the work. And we see that children do learn in the absence of punitive measures.

Having done away with all these, it opens up a space for us to raise questions that will help us learn about ourselves. We can begin to ask questions that will throw light on our own attitudes, feelings and thoughts. Like we can ask: *why am I not motivated? Why do I feel competitive?* As a teacher I can ask: *What creative practices can we engage with in the absence of these tools?*

Assessment

Now moving on to assessment, I am sharing another brilliant Peanuts comic strip.

(Sally is questioning the C grade she gets for her coat-hanger sculpture. She asks: was I judged on the sculpture? Was I judged on my talent? Or effort? In each case, she finds the evaluation unsatisfactory.)

We are interested in assessments as they give us feedback about ourselves and the children. We can observe children and see if they are responding well to the curriculum at school. We can also see what works, what doesn't, are there difficulties we need to address? Is it challenging enough? So the purpose is not to slot children into different ability levels or focus on performance and achievement. This assessment can be continuous, in the sense that it is interwoven with the learning process, it is not separate. It happens in the classroom interactions as the children are learning. In such an approach there is immediate feedback that the child responds to.

Bringing parents on board helps in working together to support the child in the learning process. There is a feeling that both parents and teachers are in this together. Here in CFL, we have report meetings with parents once a year. We spend about an hour for each child, sharing with parents our programme, our observations of the child, how the child is responding. However, this is not the only forum for a conversation about the child. We are in touch with parents about concerns we may have about the child and this happens as and when we feel the need, without waiting for a formal report meeting time.

Facing certain fears

Now I have already said that we don't use certain tools as they instil fear. But there are certain fears that children have, that can be worked with. The children can be encouraged to face these fears. We don't protect them from getting in touch with their fears. There may be fear of open spaces, of snakes, of peers' opinions, of physically demanding activities...there can be fear when a child breaks a sensible norm in school. I feel children can

be helped to recognise their fears and understand how it plays out in their lives.

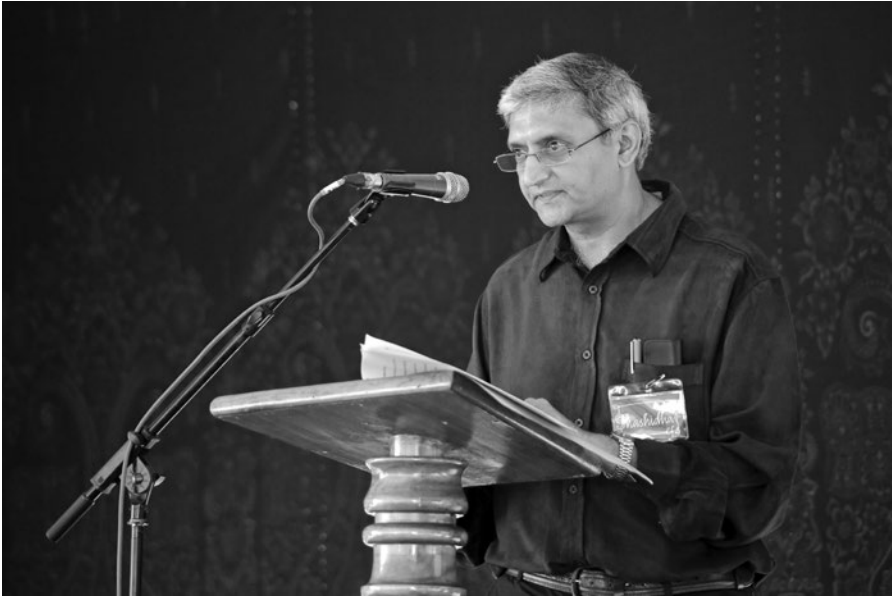
Role that a teacher takes in class

As a teacher, I may be afraid of questions in class. When children ask questions and I don't have an appropriate answer, I may get annoyed with the child for having raised the question. Here at CFL, we try to acknowledge that we don't know and that we can find out together. Yes, we do feel bad but the clue seems to be to observe the feelings that are coming up in us and see the futility of the fear we experience. I have seen that children do respond well to this and it somehow also feels reassuring to them, I think, when they see adults also struggle with things just as they do. Fear may drive teachers to be authoritative, bring order and get work done. The language we use, our body language may reflect this authority. If I am able to see, recognise that it is fear that is driving me to act, this can be the first step.

Dialogue plays a significant role in our work at CFL: dialogue amongst us teachers, between students and teachers, and with parents too. In these sessions, we spend considerable time and energy investigating our psychological worlds. These conversations need not be conclusive or prescriptive. All experiences are subject to inquiry, including the emotion of fear.

Shashi will now talk about understanding fear.

CFL Presentation: Shashidhar Jagadeeshan



This is a true story. There is a famous national park in the US called the Yellowstone National Park. Several decades ago, predators like the grey wolves had been exterminated. This, of course, had an immediate effect on the population of herbivores like moose and elk. But then the large number of elk had a negative effect on the ecology of the park, because of large scale grazing and so on.

Recently, park authorities decided to try and control the population of the herbivores naturally. So, they reintroduced grey wolves into the park. An ecologist called John Laundre decided to study the effects on elk of the presence of these wolves.

He discovered that the wolves impacted the elk in a profound manner. The very existence of wolves put the elk in a state of constant anxiety.

Laundre describes this rather dramatically:

In the eyes of an elk, the physical terrain is overlaid with a mental map of risk - a landscape of fear.

Can you imagine, in the eyes of a child, a school as a physical terrain overlaid with a mental map of risk and fear?

Krishna described and so did Professor Shyam Menon how certain aspects of schooling, indeed most school environments, may be experienced by students as landscapes of fear, perhaps shaping their whole experience of life.

One of our alumni has expressed this very well:

Trying to learn under constant fear of various factors causes so much stress that all of one's attention and energy is channelled into managing it rather than learning.

Rupa has described how we have attempted at CFL to create a landscape of care rather than that of fear and the thinking behind creating such an environment.

Fear in the individual

But, does the removal of fear from the environment mean that individuals in the community do not experience fear? Not at all!

As a part of this conference on fear, we did two interesting exercises. We asked our alumni to write about how it was to learn in an environment which investigated the role of fear in learning. And with our current students, we conducted a fear survey. Many of you have conducted the same survey in your schools.

While our alumni have been deeply appreciative of their schooling and are grateful for the education they received, they did experience fear as individuals. Here are a couple of excerpts:

Removing the fear of expulsion or corporal punishment didn't eliminate all the other fears that are presumably just a part of growing up—the fear of ridicule from my peers, of not meeting expectations, the fear of not fitting in (present, I think, in even as heterogeneous a place as CFL, and possibly made even worse, since a small society doesn't give a misfit too many options), and even the fear of authority, though somewhat attenuated.

Yet of course I was not free of fear. I mean the more pernicious kinds of fears, the ones that seem almost natural, which are perhaps learnt or are instinctive from a younger age. I suppose I mean fears of a social kind: of what other people thought of you, not being good enough, being a failure, being isolated or ridiculed or ostracised.

Now some excerpts from what our current students say:

I am afraid of losing my image in front of my friends because I don't want to be embarrassed and I want to keep up a position or status in my class (popularity). I also feel that if I don't keep up an image, I won't be accepted by the class.

I am fearful that relationships I have previously made will simply crumble either because I wasn't entirely honest or because (the other person involved) they weren't honest.

I am afraid of loss. This is not just loss in terms of death, but loss of relationship or anything dear to me.

I am afraid of losing the privileges or luxuries of life I have had so far.

I also fear not being able to earn a living when I grow up and even if I do manage to, I fear being stuck doing work / a job that I dislike.

I am scared for the future of society in terms of rape culture, homophobia, patriarchy and male chauvinism (it is disgusted and angry kind of scared). I am scared of being a cliché, not being different or unique even though I know the notion is a construct.

I think these excerpts make it clear that our students experience the gamut of fears that most of humankind experiences!

That being said, the fact that individuals in the community experience fear does not take away from the clarity with which we see that fear is detrimental to learning, that continuous exposure to stress and anxiety is injurious to the well-being of human beings, and that fear is a crippling factor in our lives.

It is also clear to us that if the world is full of anxious and fearful people,

who deeply believe that fear is inevitable and is the key to maintaining order, together we will create a world which is violent and unjust. Of course, fear is not the only cause for such a society. At another level, we see complex issues involved: social, political and economic. But at the root of all these issues lies our inability to relate and cooperate at a fundamental level to create a caring and sustainable world. For us, this inability stems from a deep sense of alienation and division that each of us feel. Fear is one among many factors that promotes division.

Any educator concerned with creating a sensitive society must therefore be concerned with understanding the nature of fear.

Understanding fear

Psychologists seem to define fear in two ways: it is a response to perceived danger in the present, and it is also a response to prevent one from being vulnerable in the future. It is fairly clear that we have been biologically programmed to react to anything that threatens us. As long as these threats are physical, say of wild animals, fire, a hurtling vehicle or deep water, it makes perfect sense to respond from a sense of danger.

However, for us human beings, our fears come from perceived threats to our psychological selves. If we go back and look at what is universal about all the fears that have been shared by our former and current students, we will see that there is a common link.

Our fears seem to be centred around pictures of ourselves as we travel through life in time. As I am sitting quietly, a thought might creep in about something I have done in the past, and I start becoming anxious: what if people I care about, or people who have the power to hurt me, discover this secret shame? Or I might project myself into the future and start becoming insecure about what life holds for me. Will I lose my job, my possessions, my loved ones? Will I be ill, will there be anyone to look after me? Or I might start comparing myself with others and the feeling of inadequacy, the fear of failure and the fear that I am missing out on life begins to take hold. It appears that I am perceiving threats to myself, or guarding myself

from being vulnerable in the future, and this perception of impending danger sets into motion all the responses in my system as if I were facing a real danger.

It seems that ideas and pictures that I have of myself, images that others have of me and my thoughts about the past and the future are the essential ingredients of psychological fear. I'd like to say this again: the very features which make us human beings unique, our capacity to make pictures of ourselves, others and the world, and the ability to recall memories and imagine futures, are at the root of fear.

While this sounds clear to us, the actual experience of fear is at a different level: physical, visceral, emotional, immediate. What do I do when in the grip of fear?

When fear strikes, my first instinct is to escape from it, do anything but face it. I may do so by distracting myself with entertainment or comforting myself with prayer, and I may seek release in various forms including talking with someone. If I am a little more attentive, I become aware of the bodily components of fear. For example, the constriction in the stomach, sweating, a sense that one's world is becoming enclosed and of course the heart's palpitations. My analytical brain soon takes over, and a lot of my mental energy goes into reasoning with fear, scrutinizing all the triggers and often arguing with and resisting the very existence of fear. It appears that I have been deeply programmed to move away from fear and not really stay with it or understand it. Is this my biological conditioning of freeze, flight or fight operating even when the cause of my fear is psychological, more virtual than real? Clearly, in this wrestling match, fear is the victor!

Krishnamurti seems to suggest a completely different way of understanding fear. In a journal entry of September 14, 1961 he writes:

When this whole process of thought, time and fear is seen, not as an idea, an intellectual formula, then there is total ending of fear, conscious or hidden. Self-understanding is the awakening and ending of fear.

What is this “self-understanding?” For Krishnamurti, it is rooted in observation.

Observation is totally free of analysis. Is it possible just to observe without any conclusion, any direction, any motive—just pure, clear looking? Obviously, it is possible when you look at these lovely trees; it is very simple. But to look at the operation of the whole movement of existence, to observe it without any distortion, is entirely different from analysis. In that observation, the whole process of analysis has no place. You go beyond it. That is, I can look at that tree without any distortion because I am looking optically. Now, can I look at, is there any observation of the whole activity of fear without trying to find the cause, or asking how to end it, or trying to suppress it, or running away from it? Is it possible just to look and stay with it, stay with the whole movement of fear?

So as educators it seems that not only should we create an environment that is conducive to learning, but we also should explore a totally different kind of learning. I'll try to explain briefly what I mean by “totally different!” It is our hope that during the next four days, we unfold this notion of learning with great care.

It is clear that as a species, we are capable of learning many things from mathematics to music, often for the sheer pleasure of learning. But interestingly, apart from skills such as language which every human seems to be capable of learning, learning in other fields is not evenly distributed in humans as a species. It seems to be enough if some members of the species learn some of the skills for humans as a whole to survive. For example technical skills such as programming—it is not necessary that every one of us learn this skill, but a few individuals having learned these is enough for a technological society to survive.

But we at CFL are interested in a learning that every human being is capable of. We are keen to share and dialogue about this learning with our students. It is a learning, inquiring into life and oneself. This learning is not only for a few, it is not a skill to be trained, it is for all of us to explore. And it seems to us absolutely necessary if we are to lead a whole and intelligent life, undistorted by fear.



Amukta Mahapatra has been involved with school education for the past few decades. She has worked in a variety of contexts, setting up and helping learning centres, schools and teacher development programmes in rural and urban India. She has worked with small schools and has also developed programmes that have been implemented by education departments across many states in India. Among many other projects, she has set up a centre for educators called SchoolScape that focuses on the development of the teacher to enable schools, organizations and education departments to enhance the quality of learning in the classroom. Amukta is the founder and was the Principal of Abacus School, Chennai, where for the first time in India in recent years, Montessori ideas of education were applied up to the elementary level while following the mainstream syllabus. She has been an education consultant for the government of Tamil Nadu and has developed methodologies for training on a large scale. She has been an educational consultant for UNICEF and has worked with several NGOs in setting up educational programmes. She has also been involved with the International Democratic Education movement. Wherever she has worked, she has fought for the child's right to live and learn spontaneously.

Good evening. I feel like the last player of the cricket match, and you're waiting to get us out as quickly as possible! I'm sure the afternoon has been wonderful actually, to discuss in small groups, at least in our group it was, and I hope you're ready to listen a little bit. I'm making it rather short and keeping it kind of open for discussions later.

While I was writing this paper I was thinking about when did I come across fear? What was my experience of it and what was Krishnaji (*J Krishnamurti*) saying? I have been listening to Krishnaji ever since I was about 15 years old I think. And after many listenings, readings, discussions, one day I discovered that wherever the topic started—it could be about violence, it could be about women, it could be about appreciation of beauty, or learning itself—and somewhere it would meander and fall (thud!) on fear. And I discovered that, and from then on I've been wanting to explore what this fear is about, and I think CFL has been courageous to take this up as a topic to help us to examine it further.

Coming from a personal angle, I had never lived alone even for one day or night till I was 26 years old, because I was living in a joint family, and even after I married I lived in kind of a combined family. I was always eager, from the time I was quite young, to go off and live by myself but that situation never happened. And the first time I found myself alone was after I was 26, and it wasn't planned but I just happened to be alone. And there was no fear...but there was joy. An amazing amount of joy. And I was astounded by that. People always told me it's frightening to be alone... but that joy was something that was quite remarkable, and I still continue to have that when I'm alone.

So I moved, in a way, from looking at "What is one fearful of?" to looking at the nature of fear itself. I felt that only through one's experience could one address this idea of fear that Krishnaji was trying very hard to explain to us, or share his own understanding with us. For whoever was listening to him, it was kind of intellectual. It remained that way. And many of us were not getting the idea, and very often he would get angry or exasperated that people were not getting it!

Of course as a child we went through the usual fears that were talked about in the morning. About things, about events, about experiences.

When I really experienced fear was in a classroom, in a hall of 70 odd people; I could really feel that kind of fear. And I'll give you some kind of a background to it. I was invited by the government of Tamil Nadu in 2001, to look at the possibility of bringing in a kind of a learning atmosphere in schools, and also increase the levels of learning and examine what could be done in the government system. The programme was very tentative. There was no great plan, there was no visioning exercise, etc. We said, let's look at the possibility of doing something and we will explore together what is possible within the government sphere. I was invited with the idea that since I have worked with one Abacus school (*in Chennai*)—I was principal just before that—can we create thousands of Abacus schools. I said, I don't think that's possible, but we can explore what can be kind of relevant for the government situation.

So where we started was with the teacher educators. Perhaps many of you know that every district has a training center called the DIET (District Institute for Education and Training), and we felt that's the helm of education, and these were the senior people. And perhaps we should start there so that they can, in turn, bring in these ideas into in-service and pre-service training programmes.

When we started with them, at that time in 2001, the situation in Tamil Nadu was that they were one of the top three states doing very well: performing well in academics and also infrastructure. So they thought well of themselves. They said, we're doing well, where's the need to do anything further?

But we had to bring in a kind of a dissatisfaction. So in a way my role at that time was to ask where things are *not* happening. When we looked at learning, at drop-out rates, we felt that things had to happen. Of course, I'd like to add that I felt at that time that children dropped out for very good reasons. Because schools as they were and as they are, they don't challenge the children. Children are bored, children don't feel successful. And the

life with their families and communities was beckoning them. And that's definitely a better life than sitting within the four walls of a classroom. But our attempt was to retain children in the school system.

And we were looking to help the teacher educators who were the senior-most in the state to look at what was happening and where they needed to go and what was wrong with the system in a sense. The programme was not based on lectures nor based on talks given by me or other 'experts'. But it was based on experience, because I felt that's the only kind of learning that needs to happen. So I told them that after the first lecture on the pedagogy of the training, there will not be any more lectures. And it would be a kind of dialogue, a Socratic dialogue if I may call it, with them. It was participatory and experiential.

There were many fears and apprehensions that we were also trying to address. We did not state it at the outset, but those were some of the things we were looking at. One was the fear of expressing ideas. You know in a government system how hierarchical it is, so people, even if they are the senior-most, they will bow down, cow down to whoever is senior to them. And bully the others who are junior. So this fear of expressing ideas was very difficult to address but that was one of the main fears we were looking at. We were also looking at the fear of having a dialogue or discussion. They did not know what it meant to have a discussion. They could argue, they could debate; but a discussion seemed impossible. There was also a fear of hierarchy. If there was anybody senior they would shut up. They would say yes, yes to everybody but do exactly as they wanted. There was a fear of relating to authority of course. And also a fear of working with their peers. Working with peers, we would feel, is something exciting, something adventurous, but that was not so. They were frightened about what would the peers say, how would they judge my work. Many of their fears were rather very similar to children's responses shared in the fear survey that CFL presented in the morning.

So we were looking at examining things as they surfaced. We did not state it at the outset as I said. Two experiences I'd like to share from there. This tentative programme was for about ten days and there was a core group of

about 30 of them who in turn had to train teachers. The senior IAS officer was the additional secretary, and he usually sat in the corner somewhere (in the first couple of days). But after every session in the first two days, he wanted a conclusion and an outcome to be stated and written on the board. And that is an IAS officer's training. I was feeling angry about it, but didn't know what to do initially. And then finally on the second day, I had to confront the situation, because what was being attempted with the teacher-educators was to open their minds. Look at different ideas, opening windows, opening doors for them, and having a dialogue. But what he wanted to do was exactly the opposite, close it at every session. So in front of all of them I had to tell him: *I think we have to wait for the end of the course to conclude. Definitely there would be some outcomes but we have to wait and take the people with us, not close it at every session.* When I said that, all the people were afraid for me, for what would happen to me! But he was a good person, and accepted what I said. And it's not easy also for a senior officer who is not used to that.

The second experience was in the same ten days. When the other teachers came in, there was one session on 'meeting the community'. Very often schools think of themselves as isolated and islands unto themselves. But we wanted to open it out and help them see that community was part of the education system. So one of the exercises was that they had to go in the evenings, when the parents and the community were available, to discuss with them about the education system. So we had the core group of 30 trainers, and we had another 30 teachers and our team of about 10. They had to go and meet the community at about 4:30 in the evening, and I said let's go! Not one of them got up. Not one of them could even look at me. Not one of them looked at each other. There was a palpable fear that we had to go and 'meet the community'. They were also not in their own district, they were in some other district. And they were sitting in the DIET quite comfortably. They didn't know the community in that village. But they were so frightened, it was palpable. And they would not move, and I just sat and looked at each of them. And I just waited and waited for 5 minutes, and 6 minutes, and 7 and I think after 10 minutes I said *I think it's time to go.* But within that 10 minutes I had to kind of hold that fear of 70 people. I felt that was

one of the most frightening experiences for me also: not letting them down but also staying with it, in a sense. And if I talked, I think it would have broken that thread of holding that fear for themselves, they needed to hold it. So I said, I think it's time to go. And then slowly, one by one, in pairs and threes, they went very, very slowly, to meet the community.

It was only meant for an hour, but they came back at 9 o' clock at night. So excited! The session that day went on till midnight, because they had so much to share from what the community felt, whether it was negative or positive. That whole fear had kind of dissolved and melted away. And they realised it much later, after they shared everything in their excitement. Then we looked at that fear and they said, *why, where did it come from?* I asked them, where was it located in the body? And we examined that a little bit, not too much because it had melted away. I felt that was something that helped change the whole training programme, and helped our relationship also in a way, to make it much deeper. And the intensity after that day became even more heightened in a sense.

These were two experiences from there that I wanted to share. Again, to repeat what I said earlier, I feel to understand fear intellectually is one way, using words. But a word is also a shared meaning that we give it as a community, it does not have to come in the way. But to have a feeling and an experience of fear is important, after which we can examine it and look at it together.

I'd like to end here. I continue to be, as someone said, a non-follower of the non-guru, because Krishnaji always said he's not a guru, so I can't be a follower of a non-guru! But for what he offered each of us to explore, and also to enable others to explore and examine, I'd like to thank him from right where I am. Thank you.



Jayashree Nambiar is the Principal of The School KFI, Chennai and has been an educator for over three decades. She was drawn to education because of the promise and potential for engagement with people and knowledge, with freedom and creativity. For her, having read J Krishnamurti, the potential and need became sharper and more exciting. She is interested in the possibility of learning history through first-hand experience, observation and discussion. She has enjoyed her work with children in creative expression, motivated by their appreciation of poetry. Her educational concerns have included understanding the role that the media (toys, television and the internet) plays in childhood and in growing up, especially when it relates to pleasure, boredom, creativity and work. She is also interested in questioning the construction of knowledge and in understanding the nature of learning that goes beyond just the effective acquisition of knowledge. She would like to bring about a culture in school of understanding oneself and enabling another in working together.

Thank you Amukta, for those moments of stillness that you created through the two experiences. Could I request that all of you recall the rather rich day we have had today—the morning sessions and the group

discussions that you all have had—and allow the questions on what was said to inform what I am saying, and help make it complete. Working for this conference on fear, celebrating the 25 years of CFL, both opposing each other, yet very necessary for the two to come together, I happened to read an unpublished talk of Krishnamurti's with students in 1961. I was very struck by some of the things that he said, and I am going to weave the three of them through what I have to say. One, and I am quoting, "When the mind is afraid, there is no sympathy, there is no affection. Fear produces hatred, jealousy, envy." I was struck by that. Fear produces hatred, jealousy, envy, anger. The second, "The fear that pushes you during life like a shadow is a terrible thing. Do you know what a shadow is?" Third, "It is difficult to be rid of fear. It requires a great deal of inner search and I think it is a thing that you should talk over every day. As you talk over mathematics, geography. So, that is what should be gone into."

I speak of these three statements because it is this exploration that we are committed to in schools that question the role of fear. And these statements all acknowledge the pervasive nature of fear, the difficulty of being rid of it, and significantly that affection and sensitivity cannot be where there is fear. When I first read what Krishnamurti had to say, one thing struck me. A question that is often raised is, why are human beings on this beautiful earth not able to live in peace and without conflict? I found it fascinating, deeply engaging and disturbing! Krishnamurti's concern is for mankind to free itself from the psychological traps of fear, and arising out of this fear, power, authority, anger and sorrow. Our incessant search for security and what we call happiness. With great precision, he pointed out to the workings of the human mind, he spoke perhaps more as an investigator looking into issues of our lives, and questioning the assumptions that we have, and challenging his listeners to do the same. It is this that drew me to teach in the school, and it has kept me there.

For today's purpose when we talk of fear, what are some of our assumptions? Fear is a necessary thing, fear is a deterrent, it prevents one from doing evil, fear instills discipline, fear brings out the best in one. I think if we feel the kind of discontent that allows us to question, we might be able to go beyond these assumptions. It is difficult to be rid of fear, and we need

to begin very near, with ourselves, to be able to go far. And as Krishnamurti asks, “Why is it that we do not talk about that which concerns us the most?” And it is a question that has remained with me. We talk of a lot of things together, but what brings us all together? All human beings, all those in this room and otherwise, it is the feeling that we have of fear and all that it generates. And why is it that we look at each other with the differences—so-and-so thinks so differently from me—rather than look at the similarities that bring us together, why is it that we that we are not able to talk about those very things that bring us together? It is a question I still have.

And a question I would like to ask you all, is it true that fear really pushes you through like a shadow? In terms of its literary merit, I am fascinated with that simile. Fear like a shadow is somewhat intangible, it is rational because we can explain why the shadow is where it is. But, there is an irrationality to that intangibility, it is all-encompassing, and we usually know fear as anxiety, as sorrow, as anger, as envy. And it is easy perhaps for us to say we don’t feel fear. We rarely see these as manifestations of fear. So, in that sense, shadow is quite a remarkable word.

Now, as a school, we are committed to this exploration of fear and yet, I want to underline how incredibly difficult it is to be rid of fear. I will take five daily situations and attempt to understand a little about this thing called fear in our schools. Once, during the athletic events of senior school, I passed by a small group of middle school students who were meant to be watching the events. They were sitting apart, engrossed in making mud sculptures. I paused, out of curiosity and out of a genuine interest, I asked them what they were doing? They looked up to me in what appeared to be some sort of guilt and said, “No akka, we just took a break. We are going back.” Now, an innocuous enough incident, but I was shocked at the discrepancy between my thoughts and theirs. And there is something there. Now, this small and innocuous incident raised a significant question for me. In our anxiety that younger students do not wander off, that they are safe, and they are not unsupervised during the athletic event of the senior school, have we become prescriptive? Prescriptive meaning, constantly informing children what to do, when to do, why. Being prescriptive arises from anxiety, not wanting to lose control. Being mistrustful of children’s

abilities and sense of responsibility, we often order their lives around us. Sure that when we are in control, things can go as planned, things will be good. We inform and we instruct.

Now, this has a multiple impact on children. They learn that they have to follow what is said, and are frightened that they will be censured if they don't. This diminishes the students' sense of responsibility, rather than strengthen it. Then, there is resistance to the control. The student remains uninvolved and not accountable. I am stretching this, but it follows the same line. Significantly, being prescriptive makes students dependent and resource-less, while the teacher feels efficient.

Second. A student of class XII this year did not attend the chemistry class. He assured me that he was studying the subject, sitting just outside the classroom. Sufficiently puzzled, I asked him why? He said he knew the exam papers would be given out and discussed, and he knew he had not done well at all. The student has been in the school for thirteen and a half years. In other words, all his learning has been at school. He knows the insects on campus, the mongoose and the cat, and where the snakes are likely to be. He is the student who in junior school noticed the large stomach of his teacher and advised her to go to the doctor, because he told her the last it happened, my mother had a baby girl. He is concerned that the staff member who takes the *sambrani* smoke around so that the mosquitoes don't come into the classroom, he was concerned that he does not wear a mask. So, what has gone wrong? Or has anything gone wrong? Now, facing consequences of action or inaction can be frightening, and avoidance through rationalization or, in this case, escape appears to solve the problem. Regret over what could have been done is an awful feeling. What is that state of mind that can allow one to accept oneself, reflect, take help and see the outcomes as learning opportunities? What allows our own sense of self-worth that gets reinforced by peers, parents and perhaps, the teacher? How do we teach children to be realistic in their assessment of themselves, to face things as they really are and accept the consequences? What comes in the way, often we see, is fear of the disapproval of teacher, friends and parents, and of oneself. And the awful task of having to go back and study for the next exam.

The third incident is in a similar vein but pushes a different point. A student when asked how the exams were (she was doing her exams for the first time in class VIII, that is when they begin exams), replied: “Tests and exams are never a problem. It is fun to study and write the exam. It is the results that are the problem”. So, what makes the result “the problem”? The excitement and anticipation that makes your marks or grade what you never expected? The teacher’s non-approval? Thoughts of parents’ responses? And most important, of the peers’? Often, the student feels he or she does not know why the mark is the way it is, and feels frustrated about the effort and fearful of the next exam. This incomprehension is moot and incomprehension leads to fear. If the connection between the action and the result is not clearly visible to the child, there is incomprehension. The student feels judged and found wanting. Caught in this feeling, the student decides he or she no longer has the agency over effort, and the power is handed over to the teacher who judges - to the teacher, to superstition, to an unnatural sense of regret and inadequacy and a hatred of oneself. This incomprehension I have found most detrimental.

This is further exemplified by the following observation. I have noticed that as students move from qualitative assessment and evaluation to the quantitative, to tests and marks, the student tends to give up his power over his effort and work. Often, at the younger classes, we would hear a student tell a teacher that he has done his work, but is not happy with the work and would like to redo it. We rarely hear this in senior classes, perhaps because there is too little time to redo work. But mostly because he or she does not know how. Often the response of such a student would be, “I don’t know akka, only you will know. You tell me.” And that is very, very sad.

Both the incomprehension and the surrender are significant. I feel this is at the root of student fear—judgement by another. If one only looks at the vocabulary in this context, to give in an assignment, to submit work, they are ‘giving in’ and the ‘submission’ involved is built in. So, there is something to look at in the examination system itself, and what can schools do to work through this?

Now, as has been mentioned, for a teacher, questions prompted by fears constantly arise. I am not going to use a single incident for this, but just to say: what are the various fears? Because they come and go to all of us and not just in the initial years. Have I made the right decision to teach? Will I be able to support my family on this income? Will I make a good teacher? It quickly moves into deeper areas: my colleague's classes seem better than mine, students listen to her but not to me, he always manages his class so quietly, why am I not able to do this? This translates into diffidence, rigid positions, complaints, and difficulties in working with colleagues. It could translate into heavy responses with students, expressions of frustration and tension in the classroom. A teacher essentially needs to be a learner, not just of the subject, but of oneself; to understand the human condition and experience the discontent that allows for humility, and the affection that is care for oneself and for the other.

Parents are not out of this. At a meeting with parents once, there was a pointed statement that has remained with me. The parent said, "I want my child to be honest. But I also want him to learn to lie when he needs to." And this is what the parent would have liked the school to do. One of the greatest challenges that a parent has is posed by the notion of conformity. We live in a world of ambiguities and to find sane responses is our task. Whether to buy a child a smart phone or send her for tuition or allow him to go out with friends unsupervised, are small but very vexed situations for parents. Informing these is the fear that the child may see the parent as bad or unsupportive compared to other parents. And the parent is afraid of losing love and what conversation there is.

There is the other question to grapple with. Have I done the right thing in seeking admission for my child in an alternative school? The parents feel they want the intention of the school, they like the pedagogical methods, they feel the programmes are significant to their children's growth, they think the teachers are wonderful people for their children to grow with. But, there is the fear of what they see as the right education, there is the feeling that society will not change, human beings can never change and so children are encouraged, despite all this, to fit into society as we know it today. And with all with good intention. We want the child to conform,

parents want the child to conform to present systems, and hope that eventually the best will happen.

In the last part, I want to outline some of the structures that we have at school. Just let me know if I am not very clear because this part is in points. But I will just try to enumerate some of the structures that we have in school which would take away some of those things which create fear. I am not saying these will prevent fear. It can remove some of those things which can create fear. These are structures that we have stumbled upon, thought over and created.

1. The first is the mixed age classroom, and the learning contexts created by a mixed age group. What we have is: classes 2-4 in one room, and 5-7 in another room, studying in groups of mixed ages (seven or eight of each class). So, they don't study in the same age group. The group changes every year. So your friends change every year, and by the time you are out of middle school and into Class VIII or IX, you have friends among all your juniors from the very early years. What does this do? I think it minimizes comparison which is at the root of fear. The teacher is not teaching to a mythical average, the teacher is instead teaching to the child. The crutch of the mythical average is not there. So, you can't say for instance, these children are below the average and these children are above the average. So, there is no standard for the teacher to work with. It is a tough challenge for the teacher, but it is very good. So, comparison which is at the root of fear often gets minimized because differences are legitimized. My friends are different, we have different learning styles, even our ages are different. The expectation of the teacher is reduced. Then, students learn to give and take help, far easier for students in a mixed context. The groups keep changing every year, there are new friends, rigid patterns are broken and sometimes, there isn't the sustained tyranny of a child being looked up to or a child being teased year after year. These are some of the things that we have found the mixed age group allows for. Academically things are far more challenging for the teacher and the student, but it is worth it. Psychologically and emotionally children are very strong.

2. The next is the learning-teaching practices in school. Children have different learning styles, teachers have strengths, some of which we discover over time. So, we have tried to see that every teacher uses as many learning-teaching ways as possible. For instance, lectures not just by the teacher but by guests as well, self-study exercises, working as a group, working individually, teaching, discussion, seminars, activities. These allow children to learn differently, and lighten the burden of what is being taught. So, a child who learns in a particular way would still pick it up, and whatever be your style of teaching, he may be able to take it on.

3. Creating a transparency in testing and evaluation. So you would tell your class, "What am I testing for? I am testing for A, B, C," and ensure that the comments that I write are based on the very things I am evaluating. Sometimes, we take children through an entire exercise of evaluation: they teach, set the questions, set the answer key and correct the papers. So, it lightens the sense of judgement, it allows the student to participate in what we are doing. We have tried to support them with study skills at the right time, that is class IX, involving the parents and the students. So, at a meeting you would have 2 or 3 parents in a group and 2 or 3 students, not necessarily related, working through how to study three modules given. So, what this does is allow the parents to be involved, make it open to both the parent and the child that it is good for the parent to be involved, it is good for the child to take help from the parent. Because it is at Classes VIII and IX that children hold their academics dearly and parents feel very pressured about how to respond to the child's academic work. So, how do you open it out? How do you bring in parents and children and allow this three way relationship? Also, placing the responsibility for learning on the student, saying that it is important that every student speaks in class, giving children different projects that they can do, ensuring they are in active participation. Then, discussions with these children particularly in the years when they are doing exams, about judgement, about anxiety, about excitement, and what is it that a test really evaluates.

4. Then the relationship with students. This is crucial, this has been mentioned before. For instance, having a small number of students, knowing

them and an easy interaction allows for a lessening of fear. Can we see that learning happens in an atmosphere of affection? Through coercion and through fear, learning simply does not happen. Maybe, for an immediate result, but not really learning. Can students and teachers sit together and talk through assumptions and beliefs? Very often a teacher feels that a student *is always like this or does this*. Now how would the teacher unravel what has happened? Through questions, and helping the child also see what has happened. Rather than assuming that this is what the child has done before, this is what the child is doing again. And when there is a problem, is it possible to stay with it and not quickly shift to a consequence or a solution? These are some things we tell ourselves. Working together, children and teachers, cleaning and making things, have helped students to understand their responsibility and we bring in parents only if absolutely necessary over an incident.

And we try very hard to separate the child/the person from the action—not to label the person, but to say this is what has happened, and let us look at what has happened. The tendency in the mind is to quickly say *so-and-so has done this because of so-and-so reason* and then the child gets seen in a particular light.

5. The next is talking and working together. At The School KFI, we would like to see the school as a place where people feeling an active discontent could come together in exploration and discovery. Staff meetings are held often, once a fortnight, and we learn to discuss together. Different people learn to chair the meeting, bringing up their concern, learning to enable, taking responsibility and moving from opinions to decisions. These are very difficult when working with each other, but seem necessary. The school is essentially what the teacher makes it, like one of the amendments to the cartoons said this morning. And the teacher is the most important person in school, I would like to state that, perhaps more than the child! Can we encourage ourselves to see the large in the small and act with a long vision? Noticing and allowing for new approaches. And look at the human condition beyond our own personalities and mannerisms. Then there is the question of how do we draw parents in? One of the things we have done (we feel that it is not enough), we have Study Meetings, we have

individual meetings with parents and it always goes above the incident. But there are Theme Meetings where parents, teachers talk together, and the topics that come quickly to my mind are these. With class VIII, we want to look at: How do we see growing up? How do we understand growing up? In class IX: How is identity formed? What plays a part—peers, information—what are the influences? With class XI: Individual, society and change. So these are some of the questions that we are planning to raise at the meeting so that parents also get drawn to this.

6. It is very important for children to meet very many different people in different contexts, through field trips and through guest lectures. What this does is loosen their idea of work, fear, money and what one needs, because you grow up having fairly rigid views especially when you are in Class IX, X. By Class XI or XII, we see children are somewhat more open and there are possibilities of doing what you would really like to do. So, when children meet with people who have changed from the kind of life that they have led to lead very different lives, a farmer in Auroville or a speaker for fisher folk or a Parsi embroiderer, it is good for young people to see these things. Then, participating with others in work, interaction with the rural, working with life and issues through various field trips whether it is trawler fishing in Kerala, water conservation in Rajasthan, or in Kancheepuram. What we have found is that all these create an exposure, a resourcefulness and freedom, because one of the things that worry children as they grow up is, what subjects should I choose? What is it that will give me money? What will allow me to keep the same status? So some things are useful to loosen this!

To end, a conversation once in a dialogue class, which says something that is quite a cliché, but when it comes as a discovery, it is rather nice. We were talking about what are we afraid of, and this is Class IX, and a number of students said very many different things, and suddenly one student put up his hand and said, “Do you notice that no one is afraid of the present?” People are afraid of things that have happened and may happen again, or they are afraid of what they do not know will happen. We have been told many times by spiritual leaders that the present is what is important, not the past, nor the future. Poets have told us this, various spiritual leaders have told us this. But, when you stumble upon it in a class after a list of fears, and a

young person stumbles upon it, it is almost a miraculous discovery. So, I will end with that.

Thank you!



Questions and answers

Q: In the course of today, we have seen fear in two ways. There are some voices that said, could fear be a motivating factor? Could it be looked at positively? And there are of course many voices which said that it is such a negative force. Jayashree herself said how it is paralyzing and other things. I was just wondering whether we are quickly falling into two kinds of trapped thinking. Could we look at it dispassionately, is there any virtue in looking at fear with a certain sort of stillness?

Jayashree: Yes, I would agree with that. Because very often we try to see fear as good or bad. Now, if we didn't do that, while we have our certainties about what it does, I think essentially what has to happen is that we have to be quiet and stay with it. We have to watch it for ourselves. We are frightened people and there are things that frighten us. So, I have been thinking

through our small group discussion today. Can we actually sit and accept that I am frightened? Because running away from it does not help. Accept that I am frightened and see how it stays with me. Just watch it with that stillness you are talking about. That is for ourselves. In schools and in contexts that we are, can we minimize those things that frighten? Does that make sense?

Amukta: To add, when you talk about using fear as a motivating factor, I feel the assumption there is that children are not interested in learning, so you need something to motivate. Either song and dance and make entertainment, that is one way of bringing in learning, or fear. But if you start with the assumption that children want to learn and are eager to learn and it is a natural way of living, I feel then you will create an environment, you don't need fear for that. Children want to learn. And you don't need any extraneous motivating factors. You need to create an environment which is our responsibility.

Jayashree: I just want to ask all of you, what do you all think - is it possible to have classrooms without fear?

Q: Actually, I am always proud of government schools. Government schools work for universalization of primary education. In each and every village, there are schools and they admit each and every child of that village. But it is not the case with private schools. Private schools admit children only when the parents are master graduates, when the child has learnt the basic concepts and all that. But in government schools, many times children are first generation learners. They have not learnt anything before coming to school and their parents have also not learnt. In private schools, soon after coming home, tuition, in the morning homework and in summer music, horse riding etc will be there. In government schools there is no fear for the child. But in private schools, children have to be occupied all the time. There are many differences like this. So, after the completion of SSLC or PUC if a student fails in a private school, the child does not know anything, the child can only think of getting ranks and good marks. If it fails, what will it do? We read in the newspapers what it does if it fails. It is not so in government schools. The child will do something or the other, or do what

his or her parents are doing. So, I am always proud of government schools and teachers are also excellent in government schools. As part of a magazine, I have many success stories from government schools. Many teachers are doing well in so many ways. They are spending their own money in many cases. They are collecting money from the local resources. So, I feel government schools are doing far better.

Q: I have come to the negative side of things. The school where we work, there is discrimination regarding communities. Two communities are there mainly in this school: Dalits and Rajputs. When they have meals, the Dalit children have a separate plates and bowls. So, how will the children feel if we discriminate like this? It does not happen in private schools. The child loses his or her confidence. They also don't come to the school regularly. This is also one of the reasons for dropout rates.

Jayashree: So, mainly one thing that is universal, regardless of what kind of school, is fear. It does not matter what the context is, whether it is caste or desire for more money. But this seems to be at the root. I hope in the next two or three days we will be able to at least hold the question, as Shyam Menon said today.

Q: I just want to share an interesting experience that some of us had just last week. A group of us, not connected with CFL, visited two government schools in this area. One of the schools has had close association with CFL and we all know that those teachers are very supportive, very encouraging to the children and I think do not punish or anything like that. So, to my colleagues whom I brought, I was kind of talking about that school and saying you will really see the children there etc. Anyway, we went to the first school where there is hardly any care given. The HM is apparently almost continuously on leave or government work. The lady who is supposed to be in charge has given up. All she can do is punish the children. Interesting thing is when we sat down with the children to do an interaction, they had just switched off this lady's punishment, you know, they had moved out of that range of fear. She had no more power of making them afraid. So, the minute we began, they were so lively, they came up with all kinds of interesting ideas and the drawings that they did—we came away quite amazed.

Then we came to the second school where, as I said, I am also familiar with the children and the teachers are very supportive. And when we began the activities, what we see are the children continuously looking at their teacher to see, *am I saying the right thing, am I doing the right thing?* It was not fear, but a kind of wanting approval from that teacher. So, somehow we managed to get the teacher out of the way, but nevertheless, what remained with my colleagues who came with me to do this activity was, isn't it interesting that here is a school where the teachers have not instilled any fear and yet, children are a bit held back, a bit hesitant because they are taking their cues from their teacher, and at the other school, where the teacher has probably punished them to death, they have just switched off that notion of fear and were completely alive. So, I am just leaving this with you all to think about.

Q: I wanted a clarification from the lady who mentioned about the discrimination. I am just curious. Was it in some way coming down the hierarchy? Was it the attitude of that particular teacher? Or is it a very generalized phenomenon in the place you are working? Why does it happen in the government school?

A: We went to some government schools also. I think it is to look at the attendance. So, actually when we went, we saw on the board how many people were coming from a particular community. So it was not like discrimination was practiced in the school. But that was some census which the government had asked for to see how many students were attending classes.

Q: That I have heard about. But she is talking of something very different. Separate places for eating and separate treatment so on. Is it the local attitude which the teacher has imbibed?

A: Actually, the village is dominated by the panchayats. So, they dominate the school, they directly come to the school and they say to the principal directly that *don't provide meals to our students and don't mingle these two communities together*. A sense of discrimination from childhood itself.

Q: So, that is where the school becomes the site for reproduction of all the discrimination?

A: Yes.

Q: Jayashree, you asked whether we know of any classroom where there is no fear. I was thinking of my own school. Where I went to school when I was 13, 14 or 15. Very ordinary school, but it was called a good school and all my life I have been associated, accidentally or otherwise, with people who are doing quality work, and I have a strong belief that quality work can only be done in small groups, small circles. That is one side. I was talking to another friend from CFL. Some discussion, both of us had large classrooms when we were very young. We were 47 children in our class, and I never remember myself or my classmates ever being afraid. I wonder if it was because the teacher was good, and the teacher maybe paid attention to students who did reasonably well, and completely ignored the other kids who did not do very well. Whether that was discrimination, whether it was tolerance, I don't know what it was. We loved the teachers, they taught their subjects very well. I still remember my geography teacher, chemistry teacher. Whatever they taught, they taught very well. Half of us were probably very good students, maybe the other half were not very good students, but we mingled very well. So, I am willing to believe government schools can be very good.

Amukta: I don't think it is a divide between government and private schools. I feel quality happens anywhere and everywhere. You can't say black and white, private schools are all good, because we have seen others which are not and we have seen government schools which are good. I feel there are some quality parameters which need to be looked at. And of course, in the earlier days everyone's parents went to government schools because that was what was available in the village. And also another fact was I think, if I am right, till the '60s there was no Department of Education, the schools were managed by the panchayats. So, it was a local teacher who people knew, who the children knew, there was an accountability. Later on when it became a department and supposed-to-be professionalized, the teacher-child relationship, community-school relationship, all that kind of withered away.

Q: I think I would like to go back to what Jayashree mentioned, which is that a teacher is a very important person in a school. The way I understand it, I think where it is possible for the teacher to be able to act and have the freedom to act, then there seems the possibility of being able to address some of these things. Many systems or schools seem to constrain the capacity of a teacher to act. So, rather than debate whether it is government or private schools, in a sense we are saying, are schools allowing teachers to have agency, to be able to address these very important issues that they face with their students? In a sense, can we look at how schools may allow for this kind of agency for teachers? Whether government or non-government is not the issue at all, and if a teacher in a government school finds that agency, then you see results. You can find in a private school, a teacher not using that space, and hence you don't see that impact. So, I think in that sense it comes back to us as practitioners, as teachers to find the importance of addressing this issue. How important it is to feel the urgency, that this is something fairly critical that needs to be addressed in schools. Because it creates entire cultures, not just in school but in the society at large. And having recognized it, how do I find the agency and energy within me to work at this? And to help others, my colleagues to work with this? And to help other schools where maybe such mechanisms are not there, to find agency to be able to work with this?

A: I think educationists now have to get united and tell the government not to calculate education from the profit and loss basis. Rather, this is a 'human resource development' kind of a work going on. I think it is high time the government is told! What I find is, those who have settled in some high positions, they are always there to press and ask for the results rather than providing sufficient resources to schools. That is why government schools are failing.

Q: I had an interesting experience two years ago when I visited a friend who runs a school called Imli Mahua in Chattisgarh. The whole village was quite interesting because it was so free of fear. I thought in those five days in which we stayed, broadly it was quite free of fear; for example, it was a community which had never heard of rape. The person running the school

shared some instances when there were children who came from other villages and would stay in this village for 7-8 days on a stretch and the parents would come searching for their children. It was so free of fear like a classroom or culture. I think it could be created. I don't know. But that village and community was so interesting! Dancing together and men and women mixing so freely and it was something like quite mind-blowing!

Jayashree: Thank you. It has been very good, and I think if we can go one step further tomorrow and look at what is this fear, does it reside inside us, outside us, this may be a good question to ask.



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Let me begin by thanking you for inviting me to this important, extremely meaningful forum to look at fear, and cultures of fear, specifically within learning environments. I am actually very humbled that you think it's possible for someone who comes from the 'mainstream' to talk to all of you; who we in the mainstream look up to; to give new directions and fresh perspectives in education. I will try and look at the theme itself in the larger perspective of education and teacher education, because, to my mind,

fear has become insidious and all pervasive (and that comes across in the introductory note you have prepared for this conference). It is high time we started examining it closely to see what we can do, to first understand the problem, what is happening and how it is happening. Then we need to see what kind of effort we can put in to create a more non-threatening, democratic, egalitarian environment for our young people. Because the thought of the kind of world our young children are living in always bothers me, and sometimes I feel rather guilty about what we have been doing as adults and what kind of world we have brought our children into.

So, what is fear? And why talk about fear in schools? There is already a very succinct introduction in the CFL concept note. And I must flag the idea that fear, in the Krishnamurti sense, is the most significant thing that we must release ourselves from. So, I'm looking at that as a base, which everybody here is far more familiar with than I am. There is also the fact that if teachers have fear in them, children can't be educated in any manner to release the fear they develop in themselves.

The school as a space where fear may reside sounds very odd. But then, we know that it is there. We seem to be living our everyday life in response to fear, specially as fear has become insidious and pervasive. How has fear entered into the spaces of learning? Even the Right to Education (RtE) Act, which we feel is a major achievement after many years of struggle, felt the need to clearly spell out that we need schools that are places where children feel *safe* and which we need to create as part of our teaching and curriculum planning.

We find in our everyday life ordinary people being assaulted. Stories of road rage in Delhi are well known. Every day, people are judged, evaluated, ridiculed and humiliated on the basis of caste, gender, religion, language, community and class. I think that this everyday experience and manifestation of fear has bred deep insecurity in all of us and therefore for me, fear is not mere individual conditioning. It is a social phenomenon. It is something that we need to contend with at that scale, where the bulk of children, by virtue of the kind of education system we have created, are deliberately excluded. This exclusion is happening not only in terms of

physical and social access to education but also in terms of being excluded from environments of learning. We label many children as back-benchers or slow learners or uninterested children—I mean there are various ways of describing them. The majority of children are left behind because we have a system of rewarding only a few. The whole system of competition has not only pervaded our so-called scholastic, academic areas of achievements, but every non-scholastic sphere as well. We are rewarding a couple of children for sports activity. We are rewarding them for doing good drawings by giving them marks. For drawing an elephant and colouring it red, we give them 3 out of 10! It is just amazing how the system has created mechanisms entrenched in the means of exclusion rather than inclusion.

This is the beginning of fear. Educational practices, and even child rearing practices if I may say so, are actually shaped around fear. A very recent argument (that you must be aware of), propagated to amend the RtE Act in order to do away with the provision of ‘no detention,’ is that children will learn if they have a *fear* of examination; of being tested; of being evaluated. I mean it sounds so illogical to think that children will actually learn out of fear. But this is a belief, and it is a very entrenched belief, in parents as well. In government schools across different states, parents come and say that we have handed our child to you, and you can beat the child if she or he does not study. I have heard expressions in Hindi that are very disturbing. So, the whole idea that children are actually wild, they need to be tamed and brought on track, is part of our culture. The most dominant belief that characterises our child rearing practices and educational beliefs and practices is that education is about reforming children; that it is about inculcating desirable behavior—as if children enter school with undesirable behaviours; as if children are wild, uncontrollable and need to be brought in control.

Along with the idea that education is about *reforming children* is the idea that we need to create *controlling environments*, because it is believed that it is only in a controlling environment that we can bring about reform. It is for this reason that teachers are also typically prepared to manage classrooms and to control children in class. We are all familiar with the fact that a class with pin-drop silence is considered to be the epitome of good

learning—never mind if the child is dreaming about something other than what the child is hearing or not hearing.

What does fear do? How does it work?

Obviously, fear inhibits expression; it inhibits engagement; it stops us from learning; it closes our mind. It does not help us become more open-minded. It stops us from seeking new perspectives. It stops us from breaking boundaries. Fear shackles the mind, it restricts and stops us from relating to one another. It stops us from trusting others and more importantly, it stops us from trusting ourselves. Because when little children fear, they develop little confidence in themselves, often learning to distrust themselves. Fear preoccupies the mind, and creates a sense of insecurity.

What has the education system to do with fear?

Let me get a bit more into systemic issues, because I think fear is a result of the systemic frame of education itself. That I must judge whether a child learns or not through his or her performance is what is expected out of an education system; this thought has actually become louder and louder, and all policy measures are taken around it. Thus, 'learning outcomes' have become the centre of all discussion in education. Learning outcomes have today become the only indicator, or shall I say synonymous with, what is referred to as 'quality education'! In this sense, quality is not about what is happening inside the classroom; it is about the performance of children, about learning outcomes—that is, 'how much' our children are learning. The system also makes us believe that being able to perform or not perform is an individual condition. It is an individual ability. So if a child does not perform up to a certain mark, there is some gap, some deficiency in the child. We accept the public examination systems as fair, and that is the strangest thing.

The public examination is probably the most unfair means of understanding how we have learnt, what we have learnt, and how we can go forward. But it has been established with such strategic thinking that all of us accept unconditionally that it is a fair system. Soon after the 1986 education policy

when the Navodaya schools (class VI-XII) were set up, as a follow-up of an idea that was expressed by Rajiv Gandhi, we were very skeptical about the scheme. Some of us were trying to research the politics of the proposed scheme in order to understand what the Navodaya scheme was about and who was going to benefit from it. We came to an understanding that it had been conceived to cater to the rural rich at that point of time. Today, we see a lot of children getting an opportunity in these schools, and I would say that they are doing very well. One of the key aspects we wanted to look at was how children perform in the entrance test of the Navodaya schools. The test to seek admission into Navodaya schools is conducted for entry into Class VI, and children from various government schools are eligible to write the entrance test. At that time, the entrance test was designed and conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). There was a Navodaya Samiti in place, but it was still at a nascent stage. Nevertheless, as part of our research I got the opportunity to examine some of the answer scripts of the candidates who had written the entrance test. I was aghast to see that script after script was blank. Not a word. It was obvious that many children could not even read the question paper and had therefore left the answer script blank.

So, the pertinent question here is: what is testing and how do we assess children? I have given you this example to illustrate the point that the public ways in which we measure learning, conducting examinations and assessing them appears to be fair; but for the children who did not write a single word because they could not even read the question paper, this is obviously not a fair method of screening them out. We can argue that if children cannot read and write, they can't be given admission. That however, is a separate issue. It is the unfairness of the larger scheme of things that I am talking about—how it has entered our common-sensical notions with such ease that we believe that there is no other way but this as a way to create a 'fair' system, when it is actually not fair. The only thing it does is to maintain hierarchies of performance and meritocracy as 'scientifically' true. It does not allow us to challenge it, and therefore it justifies the practice of leaving the majority of children behind. It is a fear of being reviewed that leads us to maintain these hierarchies that perpetuate themselves.

Fear is also a result of the social and political life around us. It is a result of adult hegemony over the young. The adult-child relationships in our cultures are typically hegemonic. By virtue of the size of the adult, the little child feels imposed upon. But we have several ways and practices in our culture where the adult justifies a hegemonic relationship with the child. I would not say this is unique to India. It is a phenomenon the world over. But certainly we need to examine it in our own context: the kind of forms it takes, how it manifests and so on. It is also reflective of the hegemony of the rich over the poor, the strong over the weak, man over woman. Hegemonic relationships are reflective of unequal power relationships in society. These maintain fear, because then fear feeds into itself. For instance, we are familiar with the colonial legacies of servility that characterise relationships even today. We are familiar with Munshi Premchand's nuanced comments on the social and political conditions that compelled ordinary people to believe that they ought to be treated with contempt because they belong to a lower caste.

The National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR) conducted a research study a few years ago to understand the nature and incidence of corporal punishment in different parts of the country. Of the 7000 children interviewed across different states, over 90% believe that punishment is a legitimate step taken by adults to correct them. In their words, "If we do something wrong, we will be beaten up." The story of a little boy, Jiva, in Gijubhai's 'Divaswapna,' revolves around a conversation between Gijubhai and the children on the issue of corporal punishment. Most children share that "if they do something wrong, they will be beaten up." At the end of a long conversation, Jiva begins to wonder whether this is to be seen as a given or should we question it. So, I think we are talking about fear in the context of very entrenched belief systems and practices, and therefore it would be worthwhile examining all of these if we have to challenge the culture of fear within schools and outside.

I also feel that those who are in fear (and most of us are) probably cease to have an identity; probably cease to have a purpose. I mean especially those who live in fear a lot of the time. How then is fear related to the whole experience and purpose of education itself? I will draw upon examples from

an ethnographic study one of our doctoral students conducted recently in a government school in Delhi. There has been, as we all know, a mass exodus of children from government schools to private schools across several states. Although there is variation across states, most state schools have a large student population mainly from socially and economically marginal backgrounds. This ethnographic study (conducted in a government school) therefore focused on children largely from such marginal sections of society.

Long hours of participant observation by the researcher, over a period of one and a half years, revealed that the school teachers never really addressed children by their names. Instead, they addressed them in reference to their father's occupation. One child was addressed as Nitin, andewala (one who sells eggs), and another as Kamal, sabzimandiwala (one who sells vegetables) and in many other disparaging ways, each time reinforcing the identities ascribed to the children. Thus, in a school environment which is meant to be a space for learning and for opening new worlds to young children, these children were constantly reminded where they come from. This was the social and political reality children had to contend with every day in school.

The 2005 National Curriculum Framework tells us that children's identities need to be acknowledged, that children's contexts have to be acknowledged when we design and transact curriculum, and that we need to relate educational content to their real-life personal and social experiences. In this school, the researcher saw the NCF principles in action, but not in a manner the NCF talks about or assumes will happen. So, what was the teacher doing? The teacher was conducting an environmental science lesson. The protagonist in the lesson goes to the market to purchase something. The shopkeeper by mistake gives him extra money in return, and the protagonist returns the extra money he receives in the most honest manner. The teacher asks the children, "Have you had this kind of an experience in your homes?" Before the children are given even a second to respond, the teacher says, "I know it can't happen in your families. I know what kind of families you come from." This research reports several such examples.

The NCF is probably one of the most critical curriculum documents we have been able to produce in independent India. It is evident, however, that education is not about defining a curriculum. Neither is it about writing a good textbook. It is about the diverse responses of children to what we teach; these responses need to be accounted for and made part of the classroom discourse. And I think, to assume that this happens automatically is erroneous. The presence of constant disparaging remarks around children's identities could be a major way of inculcating fear in them. What we also tend to do then is to render those excluded as uneducable and therefore not fit for further education. The proposal of making mathematics optional for secondary school children is reflective of such thinking.

What is the everyday experience of excluded children? Reinforcing ascribed identities, or stripping their identities; stripping them of their ability to think and reason. We often render them alienated, isolated, gendered, stereotyped and set in frozen images. The consequence of this is that, as a society, we seem to have created a large pool of young insecure people amongst us—excluded and shamed children and undemocratic schools where the constitution is violated every day due to a denial of social justice, liberty and fraternity. In our everyday education spaces, we are creating people who are going to feel wronged, who are going to feel hurt. And because fear is the nucleus of this, we are hoping they will not do any harm to themselves or to society.

Educational reforms and cultures of fear

I would now like to bring to your attention how current educational reforms are making the situation much worse, especially in maintaining these cultures of fear. As a country, we seem to have already acknowledged that the bulk of our schools and classrooms are ineffective. Our analysis of why they are ineffective seems to point towards 'ineffective teachers'. Therefore, teachers either become the objects of reform or are rendered marginal to the process of education. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), for instance, declared some time ago, made it a policy in fact, that teachers need not formulate questions and develop question papers as they are very busy. Instead, the CBSE creates groups of people (and

these are selected from a pool of teachers) to design question papers. Such policy moves render the teacher marginal to the process of education. Yet, it is a common belief amongst policy makers that the teacher is responsible for children's poor performance. At one time when the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) started, policy makers felt that schoolteachers needed to be motivated. This led to large scale in-service programmes to motivate teachers. I still recall that several teachers were fed up because they felt they had had an overdose of training. The enthusiasm that led to the organization of motivational training workshops for teachers (so that children could be motivated to learn) came from half-baked ideas of the child-centred educational discourse that came into policy post-1986. That was the first time that the term was introduced in policy.

We did not engage sufficiently with constructs of child-centered education in the contexts of countries where these emerged, and instead we developed our own local interpretations. Two major strands of thought can be drawn upon to trace the evolving ideas of child-centered education: one, coming from Europe, largely the UK, from the constructivist theory of Jean Piaget, and the other coming from the progressive school movement associated with John Dewey in the US. The progressive education movement arose as a result of Dewey's engagement with the challenges of industrialized America. Dewey was particularly concerned with the breakdown of the social fabric of American society as a consequence of industrialization. He believed that schools are miniature communities within which young children can learn the ways of democratic life. Piaget's constructivist theory of development brought rich observations about how children think and learn. Uninformed by the richness of debates around theoretical constructs, the idea of child-centered education could not take root in the practice of schooling here, despite efforts to do so during DPEP and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

So, we have imported several constructs related to child-centered education, such as discovery learning, activity-based learning and so on, and tried to push these down the throats of teachers. While resistance came from individual teachers during DPEP trainings, the absence of teacher collectives did not allow the resistance to become either visible or consequential.

Teachers struggled alone, hence their voices remained inaudible. During the evaluation of the first phase of DPEP in Haryana, in 2003, we found that most teachers viewed the constructs of child-centred education with deep suspicion. In their view, schoolteachers needed clearer directions of how to teach and what to teach. There have been several sociological critiques of child-centered constructs across different cultures. For example, Lisa Delpit has presented a scathing critique of the application of concepts of child-centered education while teaching black children in America in her work *Other People's Children*. There is a need to engage deeper with debates around child-centered education instead of importing constructs and trying to root them in different contexts and then concluding that teachers are not able to teach.

This trajectory of reforms not only marginalized the teacher from the process of education, it also led to the marginalization of knowledge itself. Child-centered education was reduced to conducting isolated activities, singing songs to keep children happy. Some of the textbooks published during DPEP contained several ideas of class activities with the assumption that teachers will draw upon knowledge from other sources, the access to which was also not assured in schools. With deep penetration of the market, educational reforms have focused on skill development and the need to make education 'employment-oriented.' With this, the very aim of education has undergone a major shift, from being intimately connected with the kind of society we would like (as during the nation building years), to being linked to employability and economic growth.

The link between education and society is of little consequence to the new purposes of education. This could be one of the reasons why international level large-scale assessments do not include the social sciences, leading to their virtual disappearance from the daily timetable of schools.

There have been serious consequences of educational reforms: the marginalisation of the teacher and knowledge, and the de-contextualisation of curriculum. Short-term certification programmes, such as Teach for India, prepare teachers in a matter of weeks, leaving them ill-equipped to engage with the challenges of diverse classrooms that impact children's learning.

Severing pedagogy from context, and pedagogy from content, has been the chief limitation of teacher preparation. In effect, we seem to be suggesting that long-term investment in preparing teachers is not tenable any more. Policy measures are compelling teachers to use blueprints of lesson plans developed and marketed by large corporate organisations.

What is the most damaging consequence of such reforms?

We have abandoned the most critical spaces of intervention: one, the sector of teacher education and two, appropriate intervention in the classroom. Having equated 'quality education' with 'learning outcomes', the entire focus of reform has shifted from what is happening inside the classroom (in terms of teaching-learning processes) to testing children to assess learning outcomes. By abandoning the everyday school and classroom as the critical space of intervention, we have moved our gaze away from the spaces where fear is not only seeded but reinforced and strengthened every day.

How do we deal with fear? How will we be able to examine it and address it? There is also the important question of how the preparation of teachers becomes an important intervention if we want to examine and address cultures of fear in schools.

I will just take a few examples. Typically, in any teacher preparation programme, an important area of focus is 'understanding' children. Central to this understanding, and what we use as a frame, is the universal idea of children. It does not matter whether a child belongs to a particular community or a particular culture or religion or a different cultural context; that child is to be seen as a 'textbook' child—a child who does not have a context but has intelligence (or we may assume that some don't even have that); some are slow learners, unintelligent and so on. The universal frame, used to train teachers about children, takes away from the teacher any engagement with how specific children within diverse contexts may respond differently to different situations. And here I think a major construct that is missing and needs to be brought into the preparation of teachers is that of childhood. As educators, we tend to look at children, but not childhood. However, an engagement with childhood is more likely to take us

to context, especially because childhood is essentially a cultural construct. One is witness to multiple childhoods in India. For instance, we have a five year old child who can jolly well make a cup of tea for her mother and an 18 year-old or even a 24 year-old who may not know how to do that. There is such diversity, and I think the moment we bring the construct of childhood to the preparation of teachers, we bring in the social cultural context. And that becomes very critical to understand how individual children find expression or do not, and may be inhibited because of a host of factors in terms of the context, culture and languages they are familiar with. So, if a child is quiet in class, it may be simply because that child is unable to understand the language that we are speaking in.

Bringing in the idea of diversity in the classroom means we engage teachers with the social, cultural, political and the economic contexts of learners and learning. We also need to speak about fears when we engage with teachers. In fact we need to do so more, if we wish to root out the widespread practice of corporal punishment. Referring to the ban on corporal punishment, teachers often say: “This was the only thing we had in our hands, and now we have nothing. How can we make children learn without beating them?” We need to speak about fear with our teachers, because while fear may be a primary emotion, it is not natural to fear something particular. Fear of the particular is a social construction. A major reason for not engaging with fear during teacher training and teacher interactions is because emotions are usually kept out of the educational edifice. Talk about emotions often leads us into binaries of the rational and the irrational. We get into the whole problem of “when passion is indoors, reason is out of doors” kind of arguments. And for a long long time, we have lived with and accepted these binaries. A theater person once expressed this very beautifully: it is as if we are only this much upwards (*pointing to head*) or we don’t exist otherwise. There is no place for the expression of emotion in our educational system, so much so that even when there are behavioural problems amongst children, we refer them to a counselor. It is assumed that neither classroom, nor the teacher has anything to do with them. By doing this, we dismiss the idea of engaging with the personal inside formal learning spaces. I know of very few mainstream schools that have created

spaces like the 'home room' period as part of the everyday school time-table. Alternative schools have, of course, shown us the way of viewing children and adults as integrated beings. We need to examine how the emotional impacts learning, how self-esteem is critical to learning, and how developing attributes of cooperation and initiative taking are as significant as teaching the algorithm of division.

Emotion is both a subject of engagement and a means of education; it impacts education and is also an outcome of education. It is all-pervasive. Keeping emotions deliberately out of formal spaces of learning does not mean emotions do not find entry into everyday school and classroom. Fear is one such emotion that finds insidious ways of getting inside the classroom. Fear finds its way inside children and inside teachers. If teachers are hitting children or reprimanding them and demeaning them, that too is an emotional response. Therefore, emotions do come in, but we deliberately keep them out of engagement, out of scrutiny and out of an attempt to understand. This is perhaps why fear as part of school culture is integral to what has been referred to as the hidden curriculum. But the hidden is actually the most blatant today. We are blatantly telling our children that you are not capable of learning. In mainstream schools we are blatantly declaring children uneducable.

Segregation is the mantra of today. Education policy measures taken over the past three decades have further stratified our society. Our fathers and their fathers, our mothers and their mothers have been telling us how classrooms were diverse; that it was commonplace to find children of the neighbourhood *dhobi* sit along with a professor's child in the same class. Today we have sharply stratified systems of schooling, spawned by processes of intervention initiated by DPEP and furthered by market-based reforms. Today it will not be incorrect to say that the most marginalized are left in the state school system. A stratified system further heightens segregation in society, especially between the haves and the have-nots.

Fear is not just an emotional feeling of an individual child who is being reprimanded. It is a strategy used to maintain hierarchies and status-quo. It is often argued that we need to do away with the provision of 'no detention'

because children must know that they can fail if they do not study. Never mind if children were never taught in school, but they must be held responsible for failing to perform. So far as the onus of non-performance rests on the individual, the system is fine and status quo will be preserved; and the mainstream will continue to abdicate the responsibility of systemic intervention inside classrooms and in how teachers are prepared. The responsibility is either of the child who has failed to perform or of the parent who cannot afford high rates of school fees and tuition.

I would end by saying that the cultures of fear that have pervaded our school systems reflect but a microcosm of the larger socio-political system. The educational system with its apparent fairness, apparent deliverability, and apparent relevance in neo-liberal times takes the attention away from its more pertinent aim – to create a harmonious, socially just and peaceful society. We need to examine how fear is insidiously used as a master strategy to maintain a divisive system we are struggling against and hoping to contest through conferences like this.

Thank you very much.



Questions and answers

Q: I want you to tell us a little about Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation, because one of the reasons for CCE as I understand it was to reduce children's stress levels, instead of having them very scared once a year. Has it really worked, has there been any research on that?

A: Actually, there are quite a few things about CCE which need to be spoken about. Very briefly, CCE is one of those wonderful ideas that unfortunately we have not engaged with enough in practice and with our teachers. And then we expect our teachers to understand that a continuous method of tracking children's progress is something that will help children learn. Therefore, what our teachers are doing in the name of CCE is, instead of stressing children once every term, they are now stressing them through the year through weekly tests. This sounds ridiculous, but it is not because there is a problem either with the policy or with the idea of continuous tracking of children's progress. The problem lies with how we have typically distorted sound ideas. More importantly, we have not made the effort to create a political climate that can help the acceptance of new ideas and engage with questions of translating them on the ground. For instance, one of the serious fallouts of including non-scholastic areas in the scheme of CCE is the feeling among children that they are being watched every moment. There are also problems with the scheme itself. For instance, there are about 200 indicators on which each child's behaviour is to be rated by teachers: when they talk, how they talk and so on.

People who oppose the provision of 'no detention' do so because they fail to see that 'no detention' works in conjunction with a well-implemented CCE. If children's progress is systematically tracked through continuous and comprehensive evaluation there should be no need to detain children. Severing the provision of 'no detention' from the robust implementation of CCE has led people to believe it is a failed policy.

Q: I had a question with reference to internal assessment and how, I think, there is a whole element of fear which gets introduced. When I went to school, college, I didn't have that kind of internal assessment as I hear of

now. I did my BEd 3-4 years ago, and in the first week of the course I was informed that I will not receive enough marks in the internal assessment and so I better study hard for the exams. Internal assessment gives a lot of power to a teacher in controlling what the student is going to say. I don't think I said bad things to my teachers or was an unruly student, but it is just that I bothered them with too many questions. So, what will that do to a student in a classroom today, when they know that assessments are all stacked up this way?

A: That's very true. When we started the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) Programme, 20 years ago, we assigned 30% for internal assessment for all theory courses and 100% for practicum courses. We faced huge challenges right in the beginning, because one of the three colleges that offered the BEEd at that time was simply giving between 80 to 100% to each student. We had to work really hard by talking to people, engaging them with wider and deeper questions around assessment. The issue is that there is no fool-proof way of assessing students at any level. Can we say that the external system is objective? We just discussed how the public examination system is actually the most unfair because it treats everybody as if they are on a level playing field to begin with, when they aren't. As educators we need to constantly engage with and review the practices and systems we put in place; and not to look at any system established as a formula that would apply across contexts and time. For example, in the BEEd, we have created internal mechanisms across colleges that allow collective efforts at discussing the basis and criteria used for each course, including sharing samples of highly rated assignments.

On the basis of this, we examine whether the criterion used is robust. This helps to refine the method and criteria used each year. The use of internal assessment has a lot of merit because the teachers who teach you will know you best in that sense. That they can abuse it because of the power they hold is difficult to check. The challenge is to make the process transparent, ensuring that teachers are accountable to their fraternity and to students, in terms of the criterion used in each case. I find that the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment amongst children and even older students works very well. I have seen students giving themselves 'A' in some criterion and

giving ‘C’ in another criterion. Such measures compel students to become more honest about their evaluation, thus reaping the benefits of a transparent, honest and authentic system of internal assessment.

Q: This whole idea of schools being autocratic and fear-inducing institutions has been of great interest to me personally as well as for my organization. I completely agree with you about teachers being fearful. If we are able to look at how we could help teachers be less fearful, what do you think could be the three or four or ten points we need to be considering? I think fear emanates from adults in the school system and that is how we foster fear amongst children. So, what would be your take on that?

A: I think this is something very close to my heart because I am also of the opinion that as a teacher if I don’t feel secure within me, then I am not going to be able to create an atmosphere of security for my children. This means that during the preparation of teachers, we need to give a lot of space to student-teachers to engage with a journey within, understanding their own childhood, and experiences of life. Not just by thinking and talking about how discriminatory society is, but also reflecting on how I may have played a role in the larger scheme of things. While engaging with questions of prejudice, what is my position in terms of my lived experiences, in terms of my role, and how I may have contributed to it.

Intellectual engagement is again the only route through which we think education is possible. I think all teacher preparation, whether pre-service or in-service, must have enough engagement on issues of self-development. Maybe theatre, music and art helps through engagement in spaces which are non-threatening: spaces where I do not feel hesitant about expressing deeply disturbing experiences, where I can share openly and genuinely. That is possible if we create those spaces and invite people who come from outside the education system where teacher education is happening. Not the faculty, but someone who can come from outside the system, someone who they feel comfortable talking with, engaging with.

Engaging with questions related to my vision of education as a teacher, with questions of the self—the personal and the professional—will have to be

woven together to enable a sense of security within. Therefore, to my mind, the kind of psychology that has overwhelmed teacher education so far is very problematic. Though psychology as a discipline is one of the most significant contributions to developing a teacher, we need to re-visit psychological theory to examine its nuanced relevance to processes of education. A focus on self-development (of the teacher) is now made an integral part of all teacher education programmes in the revised norms. But if it is not implemented with the perspective, care and energy it requires, then we can go horribly wrong.

Q: As I listened to your excellent talk, I felt an underlying thread of compassion throughout and somehow I just began to wonder. All of us, if we are honest to acknowledge, we have fears, right? So, I was just wondering whether this commonality can bring about compassion? Some years ago, there was this very interesting school in Kolkata, you may have heard of this, where a Sister had brought about a curriculum on compassion. Is that necessary? Can compassion not flower out of this commonality?

A: Surely, compassion I guess cannot emerge from fear, but those of us who want to engage with it, if we come together and engage, that is good; but I would not say we need a separate curriculum for teaching compassion. It's like peace education. But isn't that part of what we do every day? And what we need to do in history, geography and in physics and in chemistry? We don't have to teach science without looking at society. So, it is a question of integrating many of these ideas. But yes, with regard to, let us say, gender or caste, now there is robust scholarship in field of Dalit Studies, Gender Studies, and I think there is merit there as well. Because what you also need is a theoretical lens through which you can understand a given reality. Peace, compassion, cooperation, are elements which have to be woven into our curriculum and in our pedagogic approaches, and that would be the way forward.



Jane Sahi has been working in the area of education for the last forty years. She was born in England and moved to India in 1968 in search of a deeper understanding of Gandhiji's life and values. Since 1975, she has been involved in Sita School, an alternative school that tries to help each child reach its potential through holistic, child centric education. The school has an emphasis on learning through art. Involvement in the school has been the basis for Jane's work. Jane has been teaching language courses part-time both at TISS, Mumbai and at Azim Premji University. She has been actively involved in the Alternative School Network, an informal group of individuals working in the field of education, for more than two decades now.

I am very happy to be here today. In some ways, because I have my grandchildren here, I feel this is part of my home also. When I arrived this morning, Yashodara said, "Please, are you going to tell some stories? Because everybody is going to be exhausted with talks." I will be telling a couple of stories, but no lullabies.

So, I want to briefly discuss how school can be a space where adults and children can look both at fear and fearlessness in different ways: through

the sharing of personal experiences, the telling of stories, exploring history, humour, role play and interaction with nature.

Sometimes people have asked me why I came to India. Actually that journey began for me in school. In the morning assembly, an Indian teacher who was spending a year in the school, Subhash Arora, who I never met again and actually had hardly spoken to, read an account of the Dandi Salt March of 1930. It was written by a journalist called Louis Fischer. He gave a vivid description not just of Gandhiji but how line after line of unnamed people moved forward fearlessly towards the raised lathis of brutal policemen in order to defy the might of the colonialists and pick up salt. It made a very strong impression on me and soon after I went to meet Devi Prasad who was then in London in an organization called War Resisters' International and it was he who gave me various addresses of Gandhians working at that time in Madhya Pradesh and Kerala.

The way students respond to our actions, our answers to searching questions, a reading, a talk, a drama or concert may be quite unpredictable and it is probably unwise to think that we can conjure up responses to even the most powerful accounts of heroism and yet to open that possibility in school by sharing accounts of where the cycle of violence is broken is not propaganda but possibly inspirational.

I heard an account from the relative of a teacher who was working in Rwanda at the time of the civil war in the early 1990s. Suddenly soldiers burst into the classroom and ordered the children to divide themselves into the two rival groups: Tutsis on the one side and Hutus on the other. The children refused and huddled together. The teacher tried to shield them but the soldiers killed 21 children and their teacher.

What could have made this possible that the children refused to be separated and the teacher was ready to protect them with her life?

These are dramatic events and not many of us are called to act in such extreme circumstances but fear and the overcoming of fear is something that we share with children; it is not that as adults we could claim to have moved beyond it in our maturity or through rationalizing about it. Our

fears change as we grow up; in childhood we know that when something or someone disappears, the likelihood is that we will see them again but in some ways as we mature we may have reason to fear precisely because we know more about the possibilities of war, crime or the uncontrolled rage of a communal riot.

A couple of years ago a ten year-old boy came to school one morning and informed everyone that there was a mosquito that could bite you and kill you instantly. The children were agog and anxiously asked the teachers whether it were possible or not. The immediate and instinctive reaction of the teachers was to dismiss this idea as mis-information: yes, mosquitoes could make you sick, sometimes very sick, with malaria, dengue or chikangunya but with medication and care you could be treated, and further, we could take preventive measures to reduce the number and danger of mosquitoes in the immediate environment.

The problem was that that was not the end of the story. Madhu insisted that he had seen this on TV and declared adamantly that it was true that a mosquito could indeed bite you and kill you. Meanwhile a number of the younger children became very fearful whenever they saw a mosquito and Madhu continued to stick to his story. Finally we asked Madhu to describe what he had seen on TV but by this time it was difficult to sort out what was fact from fiction and we still thought that he must have misunderstood, misinterpreted or exaggerated what he had seen.

Soon after this, a friend came and I shared this whole event with him and he said that robotic drones were being designed as weapons that were as small as insects and even looked like them and could be programmed to attack and kill defenceless, unsuspecting human-beings. What we had thought was absurd and fanciful turned out to be rather worse than any of us had imagined: that governments could intentionally, methodically devise a weapon that could potentially harm, maim or kill you.

This is a salutary story for a number of reasons for us as teachers (whether it was actually robotic drones that looked like mosquitoes or not):

there is a tendency in us to minimize children's fears and to argue them away as naive or baseless

rationalization has its limits and that in this case it was precisely the use of ingenuity and a certain kind of logic that made such weapons of destruction conceivable and possible to realize

fears do not evaporate so easily but can be deeply upsetting and disturbing for all of us

To recognize that, whether child or adult, fear is part of our human condition and that weakness, separation, pain, testing, failure, sickness, death and uncertainty are an integral part of our lives is a beginning of the way we can face it.

There is an Ethiopian story that tells of a boy called Miobe, meaning 'the fearful one'. He had suffered from all kinds of fear from early childhood.

He was afraid of the things he heard.

He was afraid of the things he saw.

He was afraid of what had happened and what might happen.

With some determination he set out on a journey to overcome his terror of all things.

Gradually day by day, little by little he was able to hear more and see more and so he grew in courage.

After many adventures he came one day to a village where people were paralysed with fear - the fear of a monster that roamed about on a nearby mountain and was reported to live in a cave at the top.

Miobe, in a fit of daring, promised that he, Miobe, would rid the village of this demon.

Miobe set out to meet the demon face to face. As he toiled up the mountain, strong outside but trembling within, he suddenly caught sight of a most fearful monster, the size of three enormous royal barges.

Halfway up he dared to lift his head again and this time saw the monster the size of one enormous royal barge. He saw also the flashing eyes, and flaring nostrils.

Then his courage deserted him and he turned and fled down the mountain. Halfway down he turned and saw to his horror that the monster was the size of five enormous royal barges. When he could run no further he collapsed, exhausted.

It was then, as he lay shaking and breathless, that he remembered a strange thing: that the monster he had first seen the size of three barges had, on closer inspection, reduced to become just the size of one barge—but just now, when he thought that he was safest, the monster had grown to the size of five barges.

He wondered how it was possible.

How did the monster get smaller as he approached and bigger as he ran away?

It was this doubt that prompted him to begin again his journey up the mountain, and to his amazement he found that it was true that as he approached nearer to the monster the fearful creature diminished in size.

This indisputable fact seemed to defy common sense. He was bewildered that what should have become larger and larger was in fact becoming smaller. At one moment the monster seemed to disappear altogether—perhaps, he thought, the monster was lurking in the cave.

Miobe journeyed on until at last he reached the cave. Keeping a firm grip on his axe, he entered into the half darkness. There seemed to be nothing there. Then he saw on the ground, in the half light, something as small and helpless as a newborn kitten.

Tentatively and tenderly he picked it up and began his downward journey back to the village. People gathered round him and hailed him as the invincible, the slayer of the demon, but he insisted that he had not killed anyone and showed them the fragile shape in his hands. They asked, “What is it?”

What is it called?”

Before Miobe could utter a word a clear voice replied, “Some call me famine, others plague, still others death and there are some unfortunate ones who call me by their own name. But my name is What-might-happen.”

The villagers looked on as Miobe described his journey and how the monster had become smaller and smaller, weaker and weaker as he advanced nearer until he found in the cave not a fearsome monster but only this fragile living thing.

Soon after Miobe left the village carrying the strange creature and continued on his journey.

Some people quickly forgot this event, others changed the story in the telling and still others denied the story and dismissed it as a fanciful tale.

But a few never quite forgot that fears when faced and named lose some of their power.

Naming and recognizing our fears is one way to accept them and put them in perspective. Brainstorming with children about fear is one way of accepting responses without judgement or a sense of intrusion.

Sharing such negative experiences sometimes helps children to realize that they are not alone in feeling afraid.

Answers have varied from very serious things to seemingly quite trivial things (at least to the adult mind) but they may be very significant to the child. Here are some of the things that were said:

When I'm on a motorbike and a bus comes very fast in the other
direction

If I steal something and someone finds out

If I make a mistake

If I see the police

If people do black magic

If a rat runs over me

When I see a white sari on a tree in the night
 If I see a film about a ghost
 If a cobra raises its head

A child needs to express feelings and experiences in a language that is familiar and even then may struggle to find words to communicate what is painful or traumatic. We need to give spaces, without being intrusive, where children can draw, act out or make music to express or describe what their fears are if they feel the need. This need not always be explicit but in a way that is meaningful to the child.

But, the challenge is that while we can minimize other people's fears, we can't dismiss our own fears so easily. As you see on the list that I read, some of those things may seem very trivial or even humorous to the other, but for that child they are very significant. For some people spiders or cockroaches are terrifying, for another crossing the road or navigating a hairpin bend when driving up a hill may cause panic. We all have particular fears. So, how do we address these fears which are very often painful and ambivalent?

Humour is one way to address fear but at the same time gives a sense of distance. The Jataka story of 'The Frightened Rabbit' is a story that can be told for very young children but its wisdom actually speaks to us all. You may remember that a rabbit is dozing under a tree when something hits him on the head. He leaps to his feet and begins to run. Soon many animals join him as every time he is asked where he is going he replies that he is going to tell the king that the sky is falling down. Finally the Lord Buddha in the form of a lion stands in their way and halts the frantic animals to ask them gently, "How do you know that the sky is falling down?" The rabbit is traced as the source of this rumour and is put in the embarrassing position of leading all the animals back to the tree where he had been so rudely awoken and there they find not a piece of the sky but a fallen *bael* fruit.

Fear is often rooted in a sense of loss of control and vulnerability and we look for some outside force for protection. Recently we asked a group of

12-13 year olds to talk and write about their heroes. The children quite readily responded and four of the boys named wrestlers who they particularly admired. The children then drew from their bags small cut-out pictures that they clearly treasured of muscled men marked with tattoos, along with details of their weight, height, number of wins in fights etc. My own reaction was first of surprise, amusement and then dismay, but on reflection as child or adult we often look to what is powerful to protect us. Imagining that we can bomb ISIS in Syria as a solution may well be as misguided as having wrestlers as heroes. I think we are reacting very much in the way children are reacting hoping that force that will keep our fears at bay.

But how could we introduce a different kind of hero? There are stories of mighty heroes that wield magic weapons or of Superman who defies the laws of gravity which offer a symbolic language for us to confront our fears but there are also stories of ordinary people who have responded to particular situations with extraordinary courage: for example, Rosa Parks, the icon of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama in 1955, who refused to give up her seat in the bus knowing that she was likely to be arrested for defying unjust segregation laws. Later writing about the incident she wrote:

People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.

Such stories turn upside down a view of power because here we see that the seemingly powerless hold a moral authority that is disarming. It is not that there is any magic in non-violence so that because you are in the right you are immune to danger or risk, but the fear of pain or even death seems to subside.

Stories of heroism are not always reported in the media but stories begin to circulate like the one I heard of Sachin Tendulkar that during the Mumbai communal riots he saw from his apartment window an angry mob crowding round a Muslim man. Apparently he came down and confronted the crowd until they dispersed and the man escaped.

Fear that leads to violence is very often related to a fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown. Last year I was very surprised when a group of children created an imaginary scene using wooden blocks. Usually these were used to create palaces, zoos and imaginary kingdoms but this time their play took a very different turn. The children created an elaborate battlefield with India on the one side and Pakistan on the other and played out war games that ended with the defeat of the enemy. I was horrified. My first reaction was absolute shock. This was the first time in the forty years of the history of the school that I had seen such a thing and it was only indicative of how much children were exposed to a particular kind of news. Initially I was at a loss as to how to respond. But I thought it was important not to immediately react. I thought that the children needed space where they could express something without being too hastily judged and clearly these ideas had made a strong impression wherever they had come from. But two weeks later, we showed the children the animated version of “Mukund and Riaz” which recounts a true story of the faithful friendship of a Sikh and Muslim boy at the time of Partition in Karachi. Many other things can be done to help children to connect to people or communities that seem threatening—in this case, sharing what we know about Pakistan and generating questions to find out more, discussing borders and history, taking children to visit a mosque or learning an Urdu song. There are many ways to make the ‘unfamiliar’ ‘familiar’ and to connect children so things, people and events would seem less strange and threatening.

The hostility between India and Pakistan is on one level but fear also works at a very personal and immediate level and children often feel quite helpless in the face of bullying and teasing. It is not just the victim who is fearful but very often the bully also. He or she has often felt the powerlessness of the victim and so uses power in negative ways. And it is not quite enough to rationalize these things or give moral lectures about what children should or should not do.

One of the most effective ways I have seen of actually discussing it is when somebody came from the Theatre of Oppressed. Teachers and children were first encouraged to act out different responses to bullying. The

reactions were very different: one behaved like a clown, another chose to pretend indifference and someone else reacted in anger and one more person was as though frozen to the point of paralysis. Then the group was asked to play the role of the bully in order to understand the roots of violence. And that was a very powerful experience. Very often a bully's violence is rooted in fear – the fear of being vulnerable, the fear of being weak. And this kind of exchange of roles was very important for all of us, teachers and children alike. It started off from a rather vertical level: "How are we to teach about the issue of bullying?" But actually as teachers, when we feel afraid, when we feel nervous, we also tend to exercise control or assert authority which is inappropriate.

I think many of us grew up in a time of ignorant innocence when terms like 'ecology', 'the end of nature', 'climate change' had still not been coined. I think we have to be cautious when and how we discuss with children these daunting environmental crises. We need to help children feel aware, responsible and involved but not to the point of overshadowing an enjoyment and appreciation of nature and falling into a state of despair and fearfulness. Even young children can be involved in caring for the environment in small but do-able ways such as saving paper or using less water so that they do not feel paralysed or overwhelmed by the threat of climate change.

My granddaughter studies at CFL and sometimes all the children go to the Botanical Sanctuary in Wayanad where they spend a week of camping by the riverside. Living so close to nature is not a romantic idea but learning to survive demands a respect for nature that is in some ways akin to a healthy fear.

It will be such experiences that will sustain a deep concern and respect for the environment.

I think in a number of the sessions we have discussed about what fear is and thought about what helps us to become fearless. Perhaps one of the ways that helps us to grow in fearlessness is a gradual but growing sense of connectedness within ourselves and to all that is around us. This includes the physical environment and also the children we teach.

I want to conclude with a poem by John Moffit which speaks across ages.

To look at any thing,
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say,
“I have seen spring in these
Woods,” will not do—you must
Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves,
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.

Questions and Answers

Q: I just wondered, over your experience in the last 40 odd years, you read out a certain list of fears in children. Over this period of time, has that list changed? Were there different set of fears children had in the beginning when you started your work in education and what it is today?

A: Certainly the idea of police is something that is very much on children's minds now, in a way that it was not forty years ago. So that has certainly changed. And I think when I shared about India and Pakistan, that was not something that children were aware of. The impact of films and TV was something that was not there forty years ago and has made a difference to how children experience fear

Q: This is not a question, just more of an echo of what you said, which sort of struck me. In meeting fear as it were, I think you described ways of meeting it obliquely, rather than sort of directly and it resonated with me that at times when I have tried to meet it directly, it seems to have

amplified it or made it even more difficult. And sometimes approaching it laterally or non-confrontationally seems to take the sting out of it and seems to allow it to dissolve in its own way.

A: Yes, I absolutely agree with you. Sometimes children who have had the most painful experiences are most reluctant to share them. And I think we have to treat children as we would want to be treated ourselves. We would not be ready to share our deepest fears, our deepest traumas with anyone and I think we need to get space for that, but not to probe when children are not ready to share and they may share in other ways, non-verbal ways that we would not expect.

Q: Thank you Jane. I thought you spoke so beautifully and lucidly that it was almost lyrical listening to you. There was a question on what has changed for children in these forty years. I have a counter question. What has changed for teachers in your school in these forty years? What are the fears they are coping with at this point of time?

A: It's a difficult question Maya. But, one thing I feel strongly about is that what we expect of children, we have to be ready as teachers to share and I think that we have tried sometimes at least to create spaces like we are doing here. When we sit in a small group, it's a very democratic space. We are sharing as equals. When you are doing writing or craft or painting, it's a very democratic space. We are all equal in this. It's not as we become mature, we can automatically overcome these things. So, I think the teachers, to actually experience what it is, to share in these ways, in non-threatening ways, in an open space is a way that teachers will allow children to open up. But, we can't take our position as a powerful position to probe children, obviously that will not work. Because we work together we share a lot. That has helped.

Q: It's not so much a question, but asking you to respond to something. Fear is also shown as a great source of entertainment and pleasure and we have not really spoken about that. Children enjoy horror films, they enjoy horror stories. In order to understand this, I took Class 8 students (about 13-14 year olds) to see a film. I used to read a particular story by Satyajit

Ray, called Kaghra where this man faces a Yogi in a forest. The story is about science and superstitious beliefs. But as time goes on, there is something quite frightening that happens to this man who throws stone at this Imli Baba who is supposed to have converted into a snake and something begins to happen to him. Now, after reading the story, the children were genuinely moved by the fear. And in what way is it different from the fear that one sees in films, the sensation of fear, and that offers a fairly interesting thinking about this fear as pleasure, as excitement, as sensation, because you know it will end. There is another kind of fear that seems more lasting, that seems put you in touch with something. I just wanted to share it.

A: Actually in our small group, somebody talked about going on a roller coaster, where people pay to go on these things and actually enjoy the thrill of fear. And also in a story as you said, it's kind of cathartic somehow to face fear perhaps. Very often people think they have to sanitise fairy tales to make them non-fearful. So the monster does not devour the princess, the wolf does not eat the little pig or the hero does not die or whatever it is but this may not always be helpful. So, I think there is a certain kind of excitement about fear and maybe it is a kind of preparation to face fear. But I was very disturbed, not very long ago. There was this child who said, "I laugh when I see somebody in pain," and we were all so startled by this comment, I mean we could not jump in and make moral judgement. But it was such an absolutely shocking thing to say. This is not a story, this is not a roller coaster ride. This is seeing somebody in pain and laughing. And how do we deal with that sense of relief that it is not happening to you, but somebody else? I think that is where thinking about connectedness, what is happening to someone else is also touching us. So, humour, the thrill of fear, the thrill of somebody else's discomfort. Why do people tease another person? Why do people bully? There are very deep reasons because you disconnect from that person as a person. You de-humanise them in some way. But we can somehow create positive experiences of really connecting, so you are that person, not something other. But I think there are multiple ways and fear is multifaceted. I think you are absolutely right that there is place for the ghost story, there is place for the horrific fairy tale which helps us to actually come to terms with our deepest fears.

Q: I am reminded of the India-Pakistan war. This happened in our school. When I came in one afternoon, I found children sleeping on either side of the ground. In between there was a line of boulders which we had kept for construction work. I was annoyed that they had disturbed the boulder heap. So I asked them “What are you doing?” “We are playing.” “What play?” “Kargil war.” “But what is this line?” “Line Of Control.” I left it at that. Now, I am asking you why should we give meaning that children have got that much idea of a war? They were just playing. Why can’t we dismiss the act as just a children’s play? What is your reaction to it? Should we give so much meaning to it?

A: I think play is one of the ways of enacting our fears and our ability to overcome fears. And that is a healthy thing and as I said, I did not feel it was the right thing to directly kind of jump in and say “India and Pakistan, we are neighbours.” It was not appropriate, but I did also felt that we could not just leave it like that, We could find another way, another time, another kind of possibility of raising a question. Coming back to the first point, it is not propaganda, but kind of opening a possibility of breaking the cycle of violence and that is a model we need to give to our children, to give to each other, that it is possible to think of other ways than killing, or maiming, or teasing or bullying. But how you do it is very important and to find creative, flexible ways of responding to that.

I can see your question and there is a problem every time children play, whether it is cops and robbers or whatever, if we always kind of come in with a heavy moral hand.

Q: I was happy that at least there were children who agreed to play Pakistanis!



Umashanker Periodi has been active in the development domain for three decades. A post-graduate in social work, he has worked intensively with the Soliga tribe in BR Hills and with other communities as well. Actively involved in training individuals for participation and communication, he was instrumental in designing the training of cadres of the Total Literacy Campaign in Karnataka. He has been a lecturer teaching community development and communication at the School of Social Work, Mangalore, for some time. He is a founder member of the Karnataka State Trainers Collective, which is focused on building the capacity of small NGOs in Karnataka. He is interested in the demystification of research, and 'Barefoot research' is a process he has developed to introduce research to field workers and primary school teachers. He has been with Azim Premji Foundation since 2003 and at present is leading their initiatives in North East Karnataka.

What I am presenting is a sharing of the teachers who work with us, and the sharing is on a discussion around fear. I don't want to call it a study. Though we have been working in this area since 2003, we have not seriously discussed with them on fear. So when CFL suggested it, it triggered us

to discuss with them on the subject 'fear'. It was quite difficult to discuss about fear. We did this with the Government school teachers in one area, in North East Karnataka. So, that is the limit. I would also like to say that it is a work in progress. It is not a complete finding of a study. I am presenting this here with an expectation that many of you will give your suggestions and also a way forward for us. Basically these were the objectives: to understand the teacher's perspective about fear in the school system, to understand how fear operates in school grassroots processes, to understand the fear of teachers in the system, to understand the personal fears of teachers, to understand how teachers deal with fear and also see fear with respect to different groups. These were the questions. It is not that we have got answers to all these questions.

About the background, I will not be getting into it, as we have spoken plenty of things in the last two days. We know that there is fear in the society, and school is a subset of society, so there is fear in the school also. We experience fear, and we are also a source of fear for others.

Next is the methodology. To begin with, we had group discussions with different groups. And then, from what came up, we did a survey in 60 schools in 8 districts of North East Karnataka. Later we had in-depth interviews with individual teachers. What I am speaking today is of two things: the Focus Group Discussion, and the interviews we had with teachers. The survey, though we have collected information, we have not analyzed it, that is why it is work in progress.

Our findings reveal two perspectives: fear as a motivator and fear as stress. When we discussed with teachers, we found that fear is not spoken as just fear or pure fear, there is nothing like that. They refer to respect, discipline, devotion, etc., all these things put together is fear. So you can't just remove fear and then speak about it. Invariably it comes to *bhaya-bhakthi* and other forms. So, having a dialogue or discussion on fear is quite difficult as all these things come in, that is how they see fear. And when you go deeper, the element of control comes along with fear. Most of the teachers speak of controlling students, controlling the classroom. Teachers say that to make the students work, they need fear. They also say that to prevent children

from committing mistakes, they need the element of fear! This part is also a very important element, because in education nowadays we say that we learn through our mistakes. But what if you create fear and see that they don't commit mistakes?

About the different types of fear they create: verbal—shouting, humiliating, scolding, threatening, discouraging; non-verbal—glaring, angry expressions, body postures, ignoring, neglecting and then comes beating. But, when we speak to teachers, their expressions are very interesting: “When children are disturbing I just stare at them, without even speaking a word, and the children keep quiet.” But some teachers who were part of the discussion said that for some teachers there is no need for this: their entry itself is enough! So there are several kinds of non-verbal actions that they create.

Then we went deeper into the teachers' discussion, on what is it that *they* fear. There is one fear about competence, that I don't know the subject. In North East Karnataka, they are asked to teach in English and they don't know English, they are not trained in English. There are many teachers who have to teach science who are not from that background. So around these competency-based issues, there is fear. Then, there is the fear of students questioning the teacher. In discussion, some of them said, “When students question, we fear.” When we asked what type of questions, they immediately said, “Out-of-syllabus questions.” This is very interesting, because the teachers fear out-of-syllabus questions, so also the children! What is this *syllabus*? And also why is everybody interested in out-of-syllabus issues? Plenty of teachers have spoken about it, the teacher being vulnerable in front of the students, and the students seeing that teachers do not know something... this came up very strongly. The issue of losing control over students in the classroom is a big issue. Everyone, quite a lot of teachers speak about it.

On performance and accountability (for example, the class 10 results), most teachers do say the results can be a scary issue for both teachers and children. I come from North East Karnataka, where the results of class 10 in most of the districts are poor. When officials from Bengaluru visit

these districts, the local officers and teachers get scared that they may discuss about class 10 results. And it is invariably so. Several times, our headmasters and officers are called to Bengaluru to discuss about the class 10 results and other issues. Even otherwise, when school inspections take place and the Government officials come, teachers are scared because the officers ask the children to respond to the questions they ask. When children fail to answer the questions asked by the inspectors, they immediately pounce on the teachers. In the focus group discussions, the teachers say: "This is very unfair. Many times children will know the answer. But the situation is such that the children don't answer, it could be for various reasons. But immediately we are pounced upon. So, this part of the performance of the child to gauge my capacity is something very fearful."

So teachers fear the higher officials, and they also fear the students, and then there is the fear of the community. Now in Karnataka with the School Development and Monitoring Committees coming up, teachers say that there is a lot of disturbance, and so there is fear of SDMCs. The teachers present it as a fearful situation for them, but there are others who say it is not as bad as it looks.

The next part is about dealing with fear. Many teachers are not articulate about how they deal with their fears. They are not able to say how they deal with them. Whatever we have got is from the discussions. We think this is one area they have not thought about. They might be dealing with fear, but might have failed to articulate the issue. They say they will increase their competency, regulate themselves. They also say that they are meeting the expectations of the parents and the community at large. They also spoke about how they seek support of others.

Later while discussing our observations, we found that there is some variation between different groups. The lady teachers' articulation was not specifically about the classroom or school, they spoke generally about fear that any woman in an Indian condition would have. Their anxiety about safety while travelling, toilets either not being there in the school or not maintained properly. All these create a lot of anxiety for the lady teachers. With the head teachers, one aspect that came up was the *fear of an experienced*

and knowledgeable assistant teacher. If you know the typical conditions of government school systems, when a head teacher gets posted and comes to a school, there is already a very powerful and established teacher who has been managing the show for some time. Probably that teacher would have got good community support and even be politically well-connected, and this is one of the aspects the head teachers spoke about. The difference in the discussions we had with the head teacher and the assistant teachers was like this: the head teachers spoke a lot about fear of suspension, loss of increments and receiving memos. This did not come up while we discussed with the assistant teachers.

We also had a discussion with a lot of Urdu teachers. There are several Urdu medium schools there. They mentioned that there is a lot of neglect for this entire medium of Urdu. First of all infrastructure is not good and there is not enough training. The training and the material were sub-optimal. And they were saying that if the material is produced, it is first produced in Kannada and afterwards, the same is translated to Urdu. They were saying that the material should be actually produced in Urdu, in that context, and by people who know that culture. When it is translated from another language it becomes very suboptimal. So this fear of being neglected is there in the Urdu medium teachers.

When we look at this whole thing, fear is a very complex concept. As you said, it's interwoven in many things. So, when we deal with teachers, probably we should be having this in our minds when the discussion starts. Otherwise, in training, teachers would be 'instructed' that they should be creating a fearless class! That is the difficulty. To understand that fear is interwoven in several very complex issues of discipline, respect and devotion will definitely help us, the teacher-educators, to really start the dialogue.

There is another statement that I felt is very dangerous: *a little fear is necessary*. Everybody says this. When you engage any teacher in discussion, they would say 'a little fear is necessary for a good society'. This is a very dangerous assumption. You start with a little fear which is necessary for society, and you can't question that; but along with this 'little fear' comes another element, where the teacher is very violent and very scary to children.

So this little fear is there in the atmosphere, all around us. And although we are in that atmosphere, it is very difficult to identify it. We have come to a stage where we have accepted that this little fear is a normal, natural process. And all of us have accepted it.

Why do we need to speak about fear with the teachers in schools? If we think that we can speak and therefore deal with fear in schools alone, it is not possible, because there is fear in the larger society. It has to be dealt with simultaneously in the larger society and in the school. But, probably for people like us in the area of education, it is slightly easier to start in the schools. That is why we will have to start in the schools, we have to start with the teachers.

Thank you.



Questions and answers

Q: I remembered the dialogue: "My very entry would silence the crowd". That was my first Principal who said that. She found a few of my students buzzing around with so many questions. She kept warning me, "You are

not keeping the class in order.” So, I told her, “They come with questions, I am helpless”. So, she said, “When I enter the class you see, they don’t question me. They are all silent”. We need to question ourselves, if children are silent, is it because of respect or their helplessness.

Q: When you spoke of this little fear, being used as a tool in your tool kit, it appears to me that the associated danger with this is that it prevents you from looking at other ways in which you may be able to create an orderly classroom which is not necessarily fearful. So I am wondering whether the teachers may be encouraged to attempt to suspend this tool for a little bit, and think of other ways in which they can have an orderly classroom and in which maybe learning can happen. Is there a possibility of that kind of an experimentation at least to begin with?

A: I think there are a few teachers who do experiment. Actually they are the hope. In this system also there are plenty of teachers who experiment here and there and they are our hope. But, this part of ‘little fear is not needed’ is something that we have to start discussing with.

Q: I really enjoyed what you shared. I am just wondering how close the fear and the hierarchy is. Can we talk about the fear without discussing the problems of the hierarchy that is so strong in a school set up, especially in a government school?

A: Actually fear, hierarchy and power - these are the things – it’s an equation. And they are all very well blended. Beautifully blended and beautifully delivered in such a nice way. See many of these fearful, violent things are given to people, children in such a nice way that they don’t recognize it as violent. That is why that little fear is there. But hierarchy is a very important thing and along with that the power.

Q: Did you find any change in the perspective of the teachers who participated in the focus group discussions?

A: One thing I should say, after working with many people’s groups and teachers, one Focus Group Discussion cannot do anything. But, probably not taking this as just a study, but working with those teachers for a longer

period and moving along with them, there would certainly be some change in their perspective. That's what we have seen in Surapura, one of the blocks. We have worked there for over 7 years and in 7 years, we see some change.

Q: I am from an aided school. What you are saying is true. I had received a letter of communication from CFL for this conference. When I wanted to come, my HM asked, 'I have not received any letter, only you have received the letter. How can I send you?' Then I asked, 'if you get a letter, would you send me?' He said yes. I requested CFL to send a letter to him. Because they sent a communication, I could come. Why I told you is that, you rightly shared the issues that happen in Government and aided schools level.

Q: I am just curious about one thing. What is the kind of interface that APF has currently with the government schools, what agency do you feel you might have right now and in the longer run and in what way might you be able to work with even this beautiful nexus of hierarchy, power and fear. Is there a possibility? Or does one only have to work with the teachers?

A: APF works with one stand that they had taken long back. That is, they would be working with the government system. We have started in North East Karnataka. The first part is the work on the ground with the teachers. In the process, we found that it is not enough. Then we started working with school leadership - School Leadership Development Programme, working with the Head teachers. But that also is not enough, because there are plenty of hierarchies above the head teacher. So from the State, we are working with higher officials. In a system to address an issue, we have to attack from all these spheres. The ground or base work is the main issue. One cannot do anything only working at the top level. If your base work is solid, then there is plenty of scope to work with. But, the result is very minimal. But, slowly the teachers' community gives you a lot of hope, like for example, what we are doing is working with the Teacher Learning Centres. These TLCs are at the block level and there is a space where teachers come after their working hours. It is a space with a good library, books, science and math material, computers where they can download material. After several years of follow up, we have noticed that a small group of teachers

make use of this space, and slowly try to articulate what they want. And mainly it is for their self development. This experience has also helped them to have a dialogue with their 'higher-ups'. This we see as a very important part. This is a very small measure. But it is a very positive development from the field perspective.

Q: I am trying to link Poonam's and your presentation. What is striking is in terms of what Poonam said, in terms of maintenance of status-quo. I think that is the key aspect that needs to be explored in a study of this kind. Because I see a lot of connection between how the status quo is maintained in a large system of government - the practices, norms and day-to-day routine, how they really reinforce the status-quo. Another aspect which needs to be looked into is related to women teachers, that their fear is not related to their profession. An interesting aspect I have from my observation with the government system is that it is the men at the top level from district to state level. It is the women who are teachers at the ground level. I think this needs to be looked into from a gender perspective. There is something which we read from the transfer policy, exactly how the women's issues get into the policy or interpretation of the policy. In the findings, you also said that we need to start exploration of fear at the school level. As you are aware, government schools are not isolated entities. It would be problematic if you start working only at the ground level and don't work at the top level. What are the approaches you have to work simultaneously to work both at top and bottom level, so something happens where we question the status-quo?

Answer: If you see the statement, we said that we have to work at school and society level simultaneously. It doesn't say that you have to work only at the school level. But, people, we who have gathered here, like us, since we are working in that domain, probably it is easier to work at the school level. Working at the community level is quite difficult. It takes a lot of your energy and time. I say this because I come from the development domain also.

Q: I wanted to hear from you stories from NE Karnataka of defiance, protests by teachers, head masters and children against the bureaucrats and hierarchy. Have you come across?

A: In the name of fear, I have not seen any protest. But, there will be protests. It is a vibrant area, very powerful. It is not as tamed as South Karnataka. Because it is not as educated as South Karnataka. So protests are there. Things are questioned. But they are not in the realm of fear as such. I go back to the articulation by Usha which I think is fantastic. She said how children switch off with teachers who they fear. There is a stage when you just switch off. When speaking to teachers, they also come with similar thing. So yes, he is very authoritarian, very powerful and all that. But, after some time they get into this mode of switching off.



Alok Mathur has been a teacher for over 30 years in the Krishnamurti Foundation schools. He has taught mathematics, chemistry and geography, has been a house parent, and has also served as an administrator at the Rishi Valley School. For the past 10 years, he has been involved in a variety of initiatives in teacher education. These include: conceptualizing a teacher education programme for the KFI schools, teaching the philosophy of education as a visiting faculty in the MA (elementary education) programme of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai), re-designing the BEd curriculum for the NCERT, conducting retreats and workshops for teachers at Rishi Valley, and serving as a member of the National Council of Teacher Education. Most recently, he has led a team engaged in the development of a set of core courses for a teacher education programme in collaboration with Azim Premji University. Alok is deeply interested in participating in the creation of nurturing educational environments where young people can grow to become self-aware and creative individuals who may contribute to the betterment of the world.

Thank you CFL for giving me this opportunity to be able to speak to this wonderful gathering of such a diverse group of people. In fact, I have been

thoroughly enjoying and learning a lot from this conference and the variety of speakers we have had so far. And the theme of course is extremely challenging and a very important theme which CFL has decided upon for this conference. And over the last few days, we have been approaching this theme from many different vantage points and angles. We have seen fear as a very deep rooted human phenomenon. We have also tried to understand how it is in many ways a socially constructed phenomenon, and it's a systematically inculcated phenomenon. Also we have looked at it from a psychologically nuanced angle that there are many shades of fear, and it manifests in many different forms. There have been suggestions that maybe there are occasions or aspects where fear might be playing a growing role in a person's life. But by and large, the consensus seems to be that fear in most of its manifestations is an inhibiting factor; it's a factor which prevents human learning and growth. So I am going to take the latter point of view in my talk and presentation.

In my talk, I am going to focus on this theme from an angle that has been already touched upon by many speakers earlier. And my point of departure is the link between school cultures and the type of relationships in the school. We have explored this theme in some ways already: how school cultures are directly impacted by the nature of relationships that prevail or are fostered in a school community or in a school system. And this includes relationships among administrators, between administrators and teachers, and between teachers and students. An aspect that we have not dwelt on too much is also relationships among students themselves. Also I think we have been concerned about the relationships with home and parents, the local community, and also with the larger social, national and global environment in which ultimately all schools are located. So the type of relationships that prevail in a school are shaped by the ongoing behavior and practices of different participants. And also from the way the aims of schooling themselves are understood or held in the school community.

There are many kinds of possibilities in the types of school cultures that exist or could exist and it is interesting that in this small group we are getting a flavor of the great diversity of the actualities of our situations. I think there is also a lot of common ground we have been finding. Fear

is ultimately a deep human phenomenon. So I am going to begin now with what seems to be an extreme end of the spectrum of possibilities in a school. I am going to project a short poem written by an 11 year-old boy who writes about the behavior of several adults in a school setting that he imagines. So note what all that the boy has observed and written about.

The Principal Was

The Principal was ticked off
 So he yelled at the Vice Principal
 The Vice Principal was outraged
 That's why he called the coordinator stupid
 That made the coordinator furious
 He slapped the language teacher
 So the language teacher complained to the Education Inspector
 And the Education Inspector started foaming at the mouth
 And he threatened to shut down the school
 That made the Principal livid
 So he yelled at the Vice Principal.

The vocabulary of anger and violence may be colourful and somewhat exaggerated in this piece of writing. But I think one can observe that this boy has effectively noted some very pertinent things that might very well happen in a school setting among adults.

Now, let us look at what he has actually noted. One, there is a hierarchy of relationship that exists in a school. You have in this case, the education inspector at the top, the principal is under him, and as the graphic denotes, Vice Principal is of course under the principal. VPs have often under them coordinators of particular sections of the school and the coordinators have the so-called ordinary teachers under them.

Now, in the poem, he has observed a cycle of emotional reactions. There is the principal who is ticked off, we don't quite know by whom, might have been because of his wife, possibly, whatever it was, he was upset. So he yelled at the VP and the VP in turn called the coordinator stupid, we don't know why. The coordinator took an extreme step, he slapped the language

teacher. The language teacher had no recourse but to complain. She had access hopefully to the education inspector, she complained, and the education inspector was foaming at the mouth, and he threatened, indirectly, the Principal. And then the Principal was upset and livid and he again yelled at the VP.

So we see a certain cycle of anger and violence and of course, fear is very much part of this cycle. And what we notice is that any given authority's anger is reflected in his behaviour towards someone who is considered a subordinate. We see that emotions of anger and frustration are often taken out on someone who is lower down in the hierarchy.

This reaction involves fear of the superior, certainly. It also involves lack of regard for the junior. Those who are lower down, however, as happens in this case, may complain to someone who is even higher up and then the cycle of emotions, of reaction, will continue to reverberate in the relationships in the school. We may notice that the writer has left out of the poem the impact of these actions on the students in the school. But I think if we just stretch our imaginations a little, we could imagine in this scenario what the language teacher might do to the students whom she meets in the next class. And then of course, the impact which the students might themselves have on each other.

I think many speakers earlier have spoken at different scales and levels about this cycle of emotional reactions, anger and fear, which actually circulates throughout our society; and schools are very much part of that society. Now, you might say that this poem is a bit too exaggerated, adults don't usually behave like this, and this seems to be one end of the spectrum of possible relationships in a school, where an unthinking and compulsive kind of behavior generates an atmosphere of insecurity and fear both among students and teachers. But yet if we pause, could we ourselves as teachers and administrators be party to such cycles of action and reaction in our relationships, perhaps not in such obvious ways? That is something I think we need to be constantly alert to and aware of.

One way in which this might happen, transferring this to a different time scale, is the following: what we ourselves experienced in our childhood

often gets embedded in a way that it could get transmitted in our attitudes and behavior towards our students when we become adults. So, one way to avoid such a cycle of aggression and fear that passes from one generation to the next is clearly to begin to question the ways of our own upbringing, or the ways that we see around us. We can question the way we have been dealt with as children and try to learn about our own emotional reactions that might have got embedded in us. We can be aware of and watch our own emotions or anxieties or fears or defensive or aggressive tendencies and our behavior, and I think these are a continuing aspect of our self-education throughout life. I would like to come back to this point a little later.

I would now like us to look at some common manifestations of emotions of fear or anxiety as experienced by children when they are young, and especially when they start going to school. I would just like to very briefly share a story that the mother of a child who has joined our school this year told us. This girl has changed seven schools before coming here. And she told us that the first experience of school which this child had was when the mother went to school to leave the child on the first day. The mother had to leave eventually. The child was snatched from the mother's hand, maybe three or four years old, and she was told, now you go away, and the door of the classroom was shut. Now you can imagine what the state of such a child would be. The kind of anxiety which would be felt, being separated from the parents, being put into this kind of an alien world, and left to fend for herself with all these strangers. This is a true story and this left such a mark on this child that whenever later she went to a classroom and the door was shut, even for valid reasons, she would get very upset and she would want to run out immediately.

What I would like to show you is two short excerpts from something that Krishnamurti wrote in 'Education and the Significance of Life' in the 1950s which I think still has value today. He talks about fear at home and schools.

When we are young, fear is instilled into most of us both at home and at school. Neither parents nor teachers [usually] have the patience, the time or the wisdom to dispel the instinctive fears of childhood, which, as we grow up, dominate our attitudes and judgment and create a great many problems.

The right kind of education must take into consideration this question of fear, because fear warps our whole outlook on life. To be without fear is the beginning of wisdom, and only the right kind of education can bring about the freedom from fear in which alone there is deep and creative intelligence.

J Krishnamurti, 1953

So we grow up as adults with many of these fears intact or probably being enlarged; maybe the nature of the fear changes, but the fact of fear remains with many young people as they grow up. He also suggests that somewhere the cycle has to be broken, and perhaps through an education where parents and teachers have somehow self-acquired this patience and some wisdom. Only then can they help their children to grow up without being warped by fears and with a certain intelligence and creativity which they can develop and grow with.

Now, I have a short animation film to show you which shows a certain scenario by which fear is driven into a child both at school and home. And maybe some of you might resonate with the feelings this child might have. This was actually made some years ago by a young design student—I think he was at NID—who recalled his own childhood full of curiosity and wonder. But then, he experienced the kind of schooling which was shown in this film. So, this film is called ‘Do Flowers Fly?’ Some of you may have seen this. This is a student diploma project.

(Ed note: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdVh8PqFQbE>)

So the child’s experience has been shown as being akin to being put into a concentration camp. He has to sort of shut out his senses and his mind and obey a new set of rules and expectations imposed by adults in his life. Again this may be seen as a bit of an extreme point of view, an extreme representation of school. But if we look at it starkly from the child’s eye view (and this was a young person remembering his childhood, who made this film), it may not be far off the mark for many of the children in large as well as maybe small schools that have come up in all our cities and all our mushrooming towns and villages across the country. In fact, Prosenjit Ganguly, the person who made this short film, mentions in a TED talk that

he gave some time back that he made this film at the Design School when he was just about to begin to rediscover what he had actually lost through his schooling, which was his imaginative capacity and his own creative potential. It so happens that he went on to work with other school children trying to help them release their imaginations, helping them make their animation films, among the other things.

I want to draw your attention not so much to the boy and his experience, but to remind you of the two teachers who were depicted very briefly in this film. Can you recall there were two teachers? One was a lady teacher and the other one, not shown clearly, a male teacher. So the lady teacher turns the key of the brain and makes her students into parrots. She is also seen punishing two naughty boys in typical ways that teachers punish them. Then she went swinging out with the hand bag as soon as the bell rang and then comes the male teacher wielding a cane, throws a barrage of information at his students, forbids all questions and puts up a barrier of silence and separation between the students even as he gets them to write and write and write away.

Krishnamurti has something to say about this kind of interaction, which adults sometimes have with students:

Most children are curious. They want to know, but their eager inquiry is dealt with by a pontifical assertion as superior impatience and our casual brushing aside of their curiosity. We do not encourage their inquiry. Or we are rather apprehensive of what may be asked of us. We do not foster their discontent, for we may ourselves have ceased to question.

I think it is very often true in the teaching and learning situation. Further..., *if a teacher demands respect from his pupils and has very little respect for them, it will obviously cause indifference and disrespect on their part. Without respect for human life, knowledge only leads to destruction and misery. The cultivation of respect for others is an essential part of right education. But if the educator himself does not have this quality, he cannot help his students to an integrated life.*

Now, the usage of the word 'respect' here is very different in meaning from the way we normally use it in India and the ways in which we were talking about yesterday, ie, how teachers think of respect. Respect seems to be (in one way) respecting your elders, respecting your teachers, and in India at least we have always had an element of fear built into it. But here, the word 'respect' is being suggested as a true respect, it is actually a two-way process. The teacher must always have this quality of respect for his students and only then does he get genuine respect from the students. And this also teaches them to respect other human beings and that is something very often missing from our school contexts.

Now the poem that I read out and the short film that we saw, were chosen to be somewhat deliberately provocative, they might have depicted what seemed like cartoon caricatures of real administrators and teachers who were so fixed in their responses and reactions. I, of course, do believe that all of us real teachers here, and millions who are not here, are actually changing and living persons themselves, each with our own complex life situations, our own concerns and our own fears and perhaps even our own questions. I also think that most teachers actually do wish to do well by their students. Yet, we need to remain alive to the effects of our own changing reality, for there could be shades of the administrators and teachers shown here, which might come up unbidden in us!

I would like to leave us with a question (including to myself). Why does this specifically happen in schools and what can we do about it? Now, we might say that the reasons are related to the very structure of the ways school systems and many large schools are organised and the very lop-sided aims of education or schooling that they tend to promote. In fact, the term education probably does not even figure there. It seems schooling is reproduction of societal hierarchies, and you know the rest of it. Many of these factors have already been indicated by previous speakers and participants. I will just list some of them out here.

Some factors that shape school cultures seem to be:

1. Teachers have to teach large classes with many students. That puts a

- lot of constraints, there is emphasis on rote learning in teaching and on tests and exam results. Many people have spoken about this.
2. There are institutionalized competitions, marks, ranks, prizes, that are meant to be inculcating something in students. What exactly it has inculcated... I think is a real flawed question.
 3. There are of course, as we saw earlier, hierarchies of relationship among adults.
 4. There are also hierarchies among students. In fact, institutionalized hierarchies— many schools have systems of prefects, monitors, in large classes. You also have line monitors, row monitors, things like that. And they are supposed to participate in keeping the discipline.

Discipline and motivation themselves are understood as being achieved through punishments and rewards. So that's the bottom-line structure in which many schools seem to function. I would imagine that the administrators and teachers who work in these structures experience a great deal of pressures, along with the fears that come with them, of having to perform and produce results according to someone else's pre-set standards. And this is a pressure that travels down the hierarchy. What impact does it have on teachers? There could be either an indifference to knowing your students and a forming relationship with them. I would think that the teacher shown in the film—with red nail polish, who walked out of the class as soon as the bell rang—provides one such instance.

Some time back one of my colleagues was sharing a conversation he had with a group of young children, who were talking about their previous school. Talking very freely and they said, "Oh, teachers! They come, they teach and they go." There was no connect with either the subject they were teaching or with the students in front of them. Or another impact on the teachers could be a certain driven attitude to making your students achieve results in tests and exams. Perhaps the second teacher might have represented that. Throwing things at students and getting them to write, write, write and practice. Get through, get marks and so on.

So the question I have often wondered about is, what could a teacher do if one happens to be working in this type of a structure, this type of a

situation? Can individual teachers still remain committed to the well-being of their students? From my experience of having been taught in a school which was quite hierarchical in nature, though not as extreme as one shown here, my belief is that individual teachers can and do make a difference. While they may have to work against the grain of the surrounding culture, there are quite a number of things that teachers can actually do if they wish to. Because there is something about the teacher's interaction with the students which can be independent of the larger structure and may even have an impact on the structure.

Maybe I will share some thoughts I have on what an individual teacher could do.

This requires quite a lot of effort and commitment and of course a certain feeling from the heart that you need to develop your own clarity of purpose and hold wider goals in teaching students than what the school system expects of you. You need to think beyond what is exactly expected by the administrators or the parents. You want to do much more for the students and that involves nurturing your own humanity and a concern for reaching out to students, as persons not just as subjects of your teaching; which is where relationships come in. If you are relating with your students in a certain way, I think there is an impulse towards fostering supportive and cooperative relationships among the students in your classes too.

It is very important to remain alert to inhibiting and discouraging influences from colleagues or the administration, which are bound to come, bound to happen. But can it be done without feeling or getting isolated, remaining in connection not just with your students, but with your colleagues, understanding the way they think, maybe trying to make a difference, but not getting isolated. Because, if a teacher gets isolated, he loses energy. So you have to be in communication with your colleagues and maybe you might then be able to generate a positive influence on other colleagues. What I meant to say was that, this has to be done without generating comparisons actively in students' mind: 'Oh this is a very good teacher, the other teacher is bad'. So, somewhere, one has to be sensitive to not creating that kind of divide. If it is possible to do that for individual teachers, students would

certainly experience pockets of better relationships, even in such a school environment, where fear is not the primary driver of learning.

However, I feel that more than the teachers, it is the administrators who have a role here. Of course, teachers individually can do things, but from my experience, it is the administrators who play the most crucial role in mitigating the element of fear, and seeing to it that students grow and learn in a somewhat more conducive open environment. And again, I would like to make a few suggestions, what might be required of administrators, especially the principal, who is expected to set the tone. First of all, I think it is very important even in a large school to put in place systems that ensure that every student feels recognized and known by the adults in the school, including by the principal. Also promote higher academic goals than merely exam-driven learning. If a principal has to make a difference, this has to be part of his or her agenda. You have to go beyond the objectives of learning outcomes, exams, results and so on and look at students in a much fuller way.

Provide as many opportunities that are feasible in your resources for all students to participate in co-curricular activities and maybe discover their other interests and talents too. That it is not just academics, it is the whole of life also, and this is I think where a lot of skill and commitment is needed. Building expectations from coordinators and teachers of responding to the students' needs, both emotional and academic, as a primary part of their role. It's not just attending your classes, marking your books, and so on, but to actually start paying individual attention to students in the best way you can, given all the constraints. And which of course also involves encouraging an ethos of cooperative working and sharing among teachers at different levels. And all this in the context of providing some kind of fair-minded leadership without becoming authoritarian, because you cannot do these things in an authoritarian way. If you are authoritarian, and you may expect teachers to be able to work with students in a different way, but it leads to contradiction.

Finally, the school administrator and the school head, just like the teacher, have to also be alert in becoming clear in their intentions and responding

to negative pressures, discouragement, or pushes and pulls in different directions from parents, school boards or other stakeholders. I think this is the role of the administrators who wish to provide education and not just schooling.

Now, one might think that if schools and classrooms were smaller and more congenial, there would be better contact among teachers, there would be better opportunities for relationship with students and teachers and students may experience less fear. But fear, as we have been reminded over and over again since the first day, is a very pervasive human emotion that we are all subject to in many kinds of ways. So even if the structure is not the kind that I described and even if it is more congenial in terms of being smaller, there is a possibility that fear enters into the structure of relationships in different ways and it will continue to cast its shadow on teachers and students and on the overall school culture. So to highlight this, I would like to take two illustrations, two scenarios, which are fairly typical and common, whether it is a large school or a small school, and show how they may be dealt with in different possible ways.

Here is the first scenario. A senior school teacher whose students' exam results were not so good this year was called in by the Principal. Happens in many schools, most schools. Now scenario A:

"This year, the math results were bad. Why were the results so poor? The parents are very unhappy. Next year, you must see to it that your students get very good marks! Our school has a very good name. We must keep up our standards. I think you will have to work harder!"

What do you think the Principal is actually doing? This is a Principal acting out of the pressures of upholding the school's name, he is clearly worried about the parents' displeasure. He is quoting the so-called high standards of the school, which we don't know what they are really, he is distinctly unhappy and curt with the teacher, whose students have supposedly done badly in the examination. He is putting pressure on him to produce much better results. And now it is not difficult to see that the pressure and the fear that goes with it is likely to be transferred on to the students and

this is likely to lead to unhealthy teaching-learning practices. Either rote learning or giving the answers beforehand, all sorts of things happen in schools and it will clearly have an adverse effect on their actual learning of mathematics. So mathematics will go out of the window and some kind of effort at creating better results would probably be what one would see.

Now, the same scenario, a principal calling in a teacher whose results were not that good. Let us look at another possible way of dealing with it, responding to it.

This year, the math results of quite a few students was not so good. What do you think might have happened? You had mentioned earlier that some of these students were struggling with some topics right up to the practice exams. Was their performance due to their lack of preparedness or was it something to do with the exam paper itself? And if you look at the current batch of students, how do you think they stand? Are there some new strategies that are needed to support them? Just think this over and let us talk about it sometime.

Is there some change or shift in the way the principal is approaching this? There are still, of course, concerns about the exam results and it calls for a review. But it is now with specific students in mind. It is not a generalized blanket statement: your students have done badly. Let us look at what has happened. The principal is inviting the teacher to reflect on what the reasons could be for these students not doing well, without necessarily putting blame on the teacher. He is also taking some joint responsibility by considering the ways they could work with the next set of students. Maybe they could work out some strategies for the next year. The approach at least to my mind is not authoritarian, it is not intended to transmit fear. And maybe some positive, constructive responses might come out of it. This is of course provided that the exams are an important thing in the school, and that is the assumption in any case here, which I think is true in almost all schools.

Now, let us look at a very different kind of situation in another scenario. Fairly common in schools also. Students in a particular middle-school teacher Mr X's class tend to be a bit loud and excited. Other classes around

are getting somewhat disturbed. Teachers talk about this in the staff room. A group of teachers complain to each other, that X seems to have no control over his classes. It is a real problem for everybody. One of them says X lets them behave in any way they want and any way they like, and he just wants to be popular with the students.

Now, what does this typify? A certain tendency, unfortunately, which is there among teachers to complain to each other about a colleague without constructively engaging with the issue itself. It is a way in which images and opinions get formed about each other and these act in insidious ways to create barriers in working relationships. In this case, teacher X might very likely begin to hear some snide remarks being made and feel an unspoken pressure to curb the enthusiasm of his students and discipline them more tightly. That's a possibility that this scenario seems to present and not a very constructive working relationship among teachers.

A possible second scenario, here teacher Y decides to bring up to X the issue of noise from his class rooms. "Hey, what kind of activities are you doing in your classes? Students seem to be enjoying these. But, you know students from my class next door can also hear them speaking and they want to go out and see what's happening. I don't know whether you have realized this...Anyway, do tell me what you are actually doing, maybe we can work out a solution for the sounds that spill out and reaches other classes."

So think about this scenario. What's different about this?

Teacher Y is probably a more experienced teacher and decides to engage with the probably newer and younger colleague, and she directly brings up the issue with the teacher and she shows curiosity about it, rather than immediate disapproval of X's teaching practices, and offers to discuss with X the ways in which the issue of noise spilling out can be addressed. The approach is not intended to curb the enthusiasm of the teacher and will hopefully be able to address the issue while maintaining or even strengthening the working relationships.

Now, these are based on situations that one has seen over and over again happening in schools. In summary, I would say that the culture of fear in

schools is minimised when relationship in school are fostered in such a way that they allow for conversations and discussions among colleagues, where issues are looked at together, problems are addressed cooperatively rather than made being into a reason for simply exercising authority or just gossiping about others.

So having touched upon the importance of adult relationships in schools, going back to the first slide, the most important input to school culture is the adult and the set of adult relationships is what sets the tone for the students. I want now to turn once again to reasons that students feel frightened of the teachers and the effect this has and here I wish to share with you a small section of a discussion between Krishnamurti and students. They are reasonably young students, middle-school probably, on the issue of fear and the importance of learning not to be frightened.

Now, listen in to these emphatic questions, and the way in which Krishnamurti raises the question of fear. Also the ways in which students respond to and seem to learn from him, with him. Also look for whether he is trying to teach them something else, apart from fear, about listening, respect, and so on.

(Ed note: The film shown was a discussion between J Krishnamurti and students of Rishi Valley School in 1978.)

This is a small part of a much longer discussion where many other aspects of fear, deeper causes and so on, are also unfolding. Here, Krishnamurti seems to be really approaching the issue of fear by making the students think about it. But of course in the audience there are many teachers also. So, indirectly he is also speaking to teachers about right relationship, “Are you willing to understand the student?” Of course, he is also asking the students, “Are you willing to understand the teacher?” That’s a two way process.

So there is this whole notion of right relationship within which fear then does not take root and does not become something which is systemic and just stays there and you live with it throughout your life. And it is

constantly being looked at, uncovered, worked through and relationships remain robust and healthy.

Now, I would like to end by talking very briefly about the key ingredients of such a relationship and I think that it is one of the underlying themes we have been discussing through the conference. What kind of relationship is a right relationship in a school context or any context for that matter? And I can end by just summarizing what I see as some of the main aspects of this which have emerged. And this is relevant to teachers and administrators, students, husbands, wives and I think anybody really.

So clearly, one needs to hold the intention at least of understanding each other. That's the starting point. Whether it is one's colleagues, students: not quickly labeling, holding fixed images or opinions about another person. Seeing them as living, changing beings, human beings worthy of respect. Respect here means worthy of being looked at. Respect actually comes from looking, re-looking.

Second, also being self-aware. As I mentioned earlier, many reactions come up unbidden in us. So, to be aware of our own thinking, emotional responses vis-a-vis others and being aware of any compulsive unthinking reactions and slowing them down, maybe work through them. So being self-aware as a teacher, as a husband, wife, parent, I mean all of that is the second aspect of right relationships.

I think from that arises a certain value which one seems to gather, in working in cooperation rather than in competition or in an authoritarian manner, which means not comparing people with each other, yourself with others, not pressurizing, pitting one person against another, or showing favouritism. One of the biggest complaints students have about teachers is that teachers are partial. They sense it, where you are attracted to some and you are avoiding others or are hard on others. So this fair-mindedness is a very crucial part of things.

Conversation, discussion, dialogue are a means of dealing with issues as they arise, whether relationship issues, practical issues, pedagogic issues,

rather than being governed by one way directives, or just going by rules or certain procedures which are laid down.

Next, I would say, this is really a level at which we need to reach as people, as human beings, to have an interest in a deeper understanding of human problems such as fear, aggression, loneliness, envy, and this is all part of one's self-education through life. I think working through these human problems releases creative energy. It releases a different imagination of what the world could be, whether the world of your school, or family or the larger social world that you are part of.

Lastly, one can't not say something about nurturing affection and concern for others, which of course involves being kind to yourself. Being concerned in a non-separative way. I really like the way Jane ended her talk yesterday. She spoke about one of the ways of being fearless is to actually feel connected with other people. You are not separate and in a tussle. You have in some way a very common shared underlying humanity. That is the basis for affection and concern for others.

So, with that, I would like to bring this to a close. I don't know if it is possible to have a school without fear. There seem to be too many human factors, superficial and deeper, that cause fear. But I do think that if we are able to keep alive the kinds of concerns as individuals that I have tried to outline here, it may be possible that school cultures can shift from being what the title here says, 'worlds of fear' and I would add another word, 'worlds of fear in isolation', towards 'worlds of learning in relationship'. That to me means a very important shift to be made at all levels in our schools systems and this learning is then not only about, I would say the vast world that we are part of, which our subjects try to deal with, but it's much more beyond the subjects and it is vast, complex, ugly. Many things are ugly, but there are also many things which are beautiful. So the beauty of the world also needs to be something which we engage with. It's the world around us, but in parallel, there is also a vast complex, ugly as well as a beautiful world within us and I think the two have a very direct impact on each other. And that should also be a part of our learning in relationship in schools.



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I would like to thank CFL for inviting me for this occasion. I am sorry I am here only for two days, yesterday and today and I have missed a lot, but there is more to come. Now, in preparing for this talk, I really discovered that it is a very daunting proposition to talk about fear, because I think the issue is not merely something which a teacher or even a school can solve within itself. It is far more vast than that, it seems to cut across the whole structure of society in a very fundamental way. So what I am going to do today is to take you through some lines which Krishnamurti has written in

this context and also ask what can be done about understanding fear. So the theme I am going to talk about is: understanding fear.

Let me begin by saying, asking rather, what is an educated person, what constitutes education? Here are several lines from the book 'Education and the Significance of Life' which Alok also quoted from.

The ignorant man is not the unlearned, but he who does not know himself. Understanding comes only through self-knowledge, which is the awareness of one's total psychological process. Thus education, in the true sense, is the understanding of oneself, for it is within each one of us that the whole of existence is gathered.

What we now call education is a matter of accumulating information and knowledge from books. Such education offers a subtle form of escape from ourselves and like all escapes, it inevitably creates increasing misery. Conflict and confusion result from our own wrong relationship with people, things and ideas. Until we understand that relationship and alter it, the gathering of facts and the acquiring of various skills can only lead us to engulfing chaos and destruction.

As society is now organized, we send our children to school to learn some technique by which they can eventually earn a livelihood. We want to make the child first and foremost a specialist, hoping thus to give him a secure economic position. But does the cultivation of a technique enable us to understand ourselves?

While it is obviously necessary to know how to read and write, and to learn engineering or some other profession, will technique give us the capacity to understand life? Surely, technique is secondary; and if technique is the only thing we are striving for, we are denying what is by far the greater part of life.

Life is pain, joy, beauty, ugliness, love and when we understand it as a whole, at every level, that understanding creates its own technique. But the contrary is not true: technique can never bring about creative understanding. Present day education is a complete failure because it has overemphasized technique. In over-emphasizing technique, we destroy man.

To cultivate capacity and efficiency without understanding life, without having

a comprehensive perception of the ways of thought and desire, will only make us increasingly ruthless. The exclusive cultivation of technique has produced scientists, bridge builders, space conquerors; but do they understand the total process of life?

Can any specialist experience life as a whole? Only when he ceases to be a specialist.

I put this rather long preface, because I think this question about fear cannot really be gone into without understanding what education is all about. What is the heart of education? So what I am going to do right now is to explore a little bit around this theme of fear. I am going to ask some questions, some questions to which I do not know the answers, and see how we can go about exploring this theme, understanding the phenomenon of fear within ourselves.

One of the first things one notices about education is that it has an additive accumulative paradigm which means you just add on more and more and more. You think of knowledge, skills, techniques, and you may say that's not enough, you also need to learn games, sports, ok that's not enough, let us add on something more arts and crafts, theatre, outings, you add on more and more. You can have an additive model, you can fill up more and more experiences, that is also a present-day paradigm of society. Gather more experiences, more this and more that. It's like more property. I think this paradigm is an inevitable consequence of the competitive way of living, in which 'the more' is an instrument towards furthering yourself and it also connects with the desire to gather experience, and to pursue pleasure. So all these feed together into a single paradigm of 'the more' for education.

So, we have to see how this paradigm is going to lead to fear. I think it is not very difficult to see the connection. But here I ask also, can there be a different starting point, a different purpose to education? And Krishnamurti insists that there can indeed be a different starting point, a different model for education. Perhaps that is what he means when he says: *The ignorant man is not the unlearned, but he who does not know himself.*

Thus education, in the true sense, is the understanding of oneself, for it is within each one of us that the whole of existence is gathered.

So, I think here that you can see what Krishnamurti is pointing out, that the purpose of education ultimately is the understanding of yourself in relationship to the world and the understanding of life, and everything else can follow from that. If that is the seed, then everything falls into place, without any conflict. So he has really turned the whole model upside down in a way. Not that you first learn technique, you first learn how to survive, first learn all these things and then as an add-on, you learn how to deal with fear and what the meaning of things is.

Just to give an illustration, on one occasion, a question was asked of Krishnamurti, “What is the significance of history in the education of the young?” History being a subject taught in schools, colleges, universities, what is the significance that subject has (and it is a subject that frequently gets into all kinds of controversies). He says:

If history is the story of mankind, is the story of human beings, then both the educators and the young are the human beings; it is their story, not merely the story of kings and wars, it is a story of themselves. How can the educator help the student to understand the story of himself, which is the story of the past?

If you are the educator and I am the young student, how would you help me understand the whole nature and structure of myself, myself being the whole of humanity, my brain the result of many million years. It is all in me—the violence, the competition, the aggressiveness, the brutality, the cruelty, the fear, the pleasure and occasional joy and that slight perfume of love. How will you help me understand all this?

So you notice how he has upturned the whole matter. And I think this question is quite central to the question that I am trying to address. Education has to really turn inside out in its paradigm if we have to make any headway in this. Otherwise, all these questions of fear and various other things that are connected with this, which we will be coming to, are only going to be addressed from outside. And I think you are only going to be

tinkering with the problem and to use Krishnamurti's phrase which he used quite often, "You are only painting the walls of the prison".

Krishnamurti rejects the traditional model of education in a fundamental manner. He says:

Education in the modern world has been concerned with the cultivation not of intelligence, but intellect, of memory and its skills. In this process little occurs beyond passing information from the teacher to the taught, the leader to the follower. In this, there is little human relationship. Surely a school is a place where one learns about the wholeness of life.

Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the taught explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their own behaviour.

So how do we turn education inside out so that this really becomes part of the thing that we keep teaching? We are not only teaching math or history or whatever, but we are also learning about ourselves and our own behaviour.

From this, they begin to discover their own conditioning and how it distorts their thinking. This conditioning is the self to which such tremendous and cruel importance is given. Freedom from conditioning and its misery begins with this awareness. It is only in such freedom that true learning can take place. In this school, it is the responsibility of the teacher to sustain with the student a careful exploration into the implications of conditioning and thus end it.

So, I would like to take up a slightly different strand of this inquiry. The first thing I would like to say is that it's a problem that cuts across society. It is not limited to a school because if you try to do it that way you are only going to try to manage fear. You are going to cut down the symptoms of fear and make it slightly more palatable and so on.

The fear-authority-power-obedience-reward-punishment complex, in many ways it is a whole complex. It is not a single thing. It's the very glue which

holds the ambient social structure in place. And you can't really question any of these, without questioning the whole lot. The question of power comes up. It came up in that video just now, the question of authority, reward and punishment also came up here. So unless you are going to inquire into the whole thing, you usually may not make much headway. So if we have to inquire at all, we have to do so in the most fundamental way possible. We must find out what fear does to us, to our thinking, to our relationships, and to our outlook in life.

Broadly speaking, you can talk of two kinds of fears: one is the very obvious kind in which you have the fear of something immediate, something actual. Something physical like being afraid of a snarling dog in front of you. You feel a powerful emotion that makes you act instantly. There is no thought, no thinking in it and maybe one should not even call it fear. Maybe it is a wrong word for it. Our whole biological training lies behind it. We need not dwell on it very much.

But the other one is a more important one. And I think we have to go into this with our students and ourselves also. It is the danger we feel from an imagined possibility. The fear centers on a possibility, and that possibility exists only in an imagined future. And there are so many such fears, infinitely many. The fear of failure; the fear of not doing as well as my peers; the fear of what people might say; the fear of not achieving; the fear of becoming a non-entity; the fear of losing my friends; the fear of not getting admission to a good college; the fear of losing my parents; the fear of loneliness; the fear of disease, of death.

When you talk with students at the older level, you feel this tremendous fear that they have, the fear of expectations from parents, their need to get into good colleges, the need to get respect from their peers, and all of this can be lost all at once. So much of this in some ways I would say, at least some anthropologists think so, relates to our whole evolutionary history. We have very good imagination. We all know that and the power to imagine is probably embedded deep within our brains. It is one of the contributory factors to our extraordinary success as a species, which is the power to

create an imagined reality, and the ability to logically, mathematically work out the consequences of that imagined reality.

If you go back in time say hundred thousand years, human beings probably did not have that capacity and somewhere along the line, some mysterious event happened. We don't know exactly how or when, and we developed the capacity to project forward and backward and perhaps the creation of psychological time, as they call it, happened at that time. And this, unfortunately, has a great many consequences. On the one hand, that single one ability leads to all of mathematics, it leads to science, it leads to technology as we know it today and it leads to all our own civilization.

But it also seems to lead to something else. Because it is in the shadow of fast success, as a species, that we carried this fear of the imagined possibility. The question is, is it inevitable? Is there any way that it cannot happen? And the other question that arises in this context is, what is the cost of fear? What happens if we have fear within us, in what way do we pay for it? As we pick up the ways of the world, we learn how to bury our fears within us. How to dodge them, how to hide from them, how not to reveal them to others. And fear makes us self-centered, makes us insecure and insensitive. It shrinks our brains. We become mean, preoccupied with our own security, our future, our safety, we stay in the middle of the path, never venturing from the set course. It darkens our whole outlook on life, it makes us aggressive and violent.

This feeds very directly into the whole question of traditional education. We must remember that the education system we have today is largely a product of the industrial revolution. The question is, is there such a thing as useful fear?

Over the centuries, mankind appears to have mastered the art of indulging in just the 'right degree' of fear, the degree which gets results. It is quite obvious that when there is extreme fear, there is paralysis of thought and action. The brain does not function, nor does the body. But it seems that when there is some degree of fear, 'not too much', some productivity can result.

I will give you an example of situations where things can happen. Let us take something like World War II. When news reached America that Germany may be perfecting an atomic bomb, they did not know of course that actually Germany was not. They thought it was true. This immediately gave rise to a lot of fear. But they responded to it. They responded by the whole Manhattan project and throwing tremendous amount of resources, scientists, money and everything into it and ultimately got hold of the atomic bomb. So they were not paralyzed. They actually managed to do something. Of course, it was a remedy perhaps that was worse than the disease, that kind of a situation.

Another example was in 1957, when the news reached the US that USSR has launched the first space vehicle, Sputnik. It immediately gave rise to panic in the US that they were falling behind; they are a country who just cannot stand being taken over by anybody. But it spurred them into extreme action. Immediately, they reorganized their whole science and math education and so on, and did all kinds of things, which had some negative consequences also, but that can be a story for some other day. But, it's interesting how they responded. There is such a thing, the so called 'right degree' of fear. But what is the cost of it?

Organizations have learnt the art of exploiting this effect. So have schools and the public education system. Perhaps many teachers have learnt the art of doing this: the art of inducing the 'right degree' of fear of the examinations, of public ridicule and so on. And religions too. All these work to bring about a certain outward efficiency and order and conformity.

What human beings the world over and educators in particular do not realize is that these 'small' fears have effects which are far removed from the context in which they were invoked.

I think fear changes us in ways that we may not realize. They change us from within. They change us as human beings. They change the very psyche of humankind, the way in which we relate to each other, the way we think of ourselves, where your primary paradigm is survival of oneself. You against everybody else. I think fear has a way of emphasizing this

separation, even tiny fears. In that sense, there is perhaps no such thing as tiny and large. They all have more or less the same effect. As Krishnamurti wrote:

Fear is one of the greatest problems in life. A mind that is caught in fear lives in confusion, in conflict and therefore must be violent, distorted and aggressive. It dare not move away from its own patterns of thinking, and this breeds hypocrisy. Until we are free from fear, climb the highest mountain, invent every kind of God, we will always remain in darkness.

So it seems to me that the thing of first importance is that we are educated to be free from fear, because fear dulls our minds, fear cripples our thinking, fear makes for darkness; and as long as we are frightened, we shall not create a new world.

So, the case has been made quite strongly. There is no such thing as right kind of fear. Even the small kind of fear can have destructive consequences. That means we have to go really one step beyond and as educators, it is obviously important that we do not add to the many fears that children carry. But we need to do more; we need to help children become aware of the fears, conscious and unconscious, that lie within us. We must not fall into the trap of offering easy solutions to the problem of fear; but help children to face and understand fear. Most importantly, not to escape from them.

Here I use the phrase, conscious and unconscious. This is a slightly tricky thing. I am not going to dwell on it, because I think psychoanalysts perhaps like to dwell on these ideas. But, what are unconscious fears? Is there such a thing called unconscious fear? Or is it simply that it is very deep down and it requires a certain alertness, certain sensitivity for us to become aware of it. And just as Krishnaji pointed out here, these fears have an effect on us, effect on our bodies, on our health, so whether it is unconscious or conscious, it is absolutely vital that we face them and try to understand.

Typically, the approach taken by most of us with regard to fear is to solve it, treat it, combat it, find an antidote to it. The antidotes offered are many: shout, scream, fill the mind with the opposite. Traditionally, the opposite is courage. To face fear, you need courage. But courage is also of the same

variety. It is the antidote. You try to address it by being loud, by telling yourself this and that. But you are not really understanding fear.

But can one ask instead: what is the right approach to fear? How is one to look at fear? Can one actually get to know fear? Can one understand fear in its essence, rather than tracking individual fears? Fear of the head master, the fear of failure...

What is fear in itself? Can we actually help a child understand that phenomenon? What is the essence of it? What does it mean to 'understand' fear? Not what I am afraid of, but what is fear itself? How does it arise? What is its essence?

When I say I am afraid, what is taking place inside me? Is it, ultimately, fear consists of not being able to look at something, not being able to touch it, not being able to get very close to it? There is some mysterious area of darkness inside me and I cannot get close to it and it fills me with dread.

So, if that is so, then it becomes absolutely incumbent upon me to explore the relationship between fear and many, many things. And gradually, unravel the whole strands of fear. Get the feeling of the taste of fear. Explore the relationship between fear and the desire for security; the habit of clinging to the past, to the past memories, to past image; the habit that we have of dependence, in what way the habit of dependence feeds into fear; the desire for certainty, the practice of having unquestioned beliefs and dogma, what are their connection with fear.

Then there is the pursuit of success. In today's world, that has become an incredibly strong force in the world, the pursuit of success. If you are not pursuing success, you are thought of as something slightly abnormal, you are pitied by others, by your peers. It's very hard I think for a young person to not be caught in that, when he sees everyone around him in the same paradigm, same pursuit, and the feeling that if I don't go along, I am going to fall behind. And finally, what is the relationship between fear and the incapacity to face myself as I am?

And another quote from Krishnamurti:

As well as the fears themselves, we have to examine the network of escapes we have developed to rid ourselves of them. Fear is what makes us create gods. We either worship what we fear, or we enchain it and kill it. Goodness cannot flower in the field of fear.

So I am going to end this with another line of quotes. There was a talk Krishnamurti once gave, he used this very strange phrase: 'Fear is an extraordinary jewel'. Such a strange line, you may wonder what on earth he means. Let us try to see if we can make some sense of it. So we have to ask this question, is it possible for me to be sensitively, patiently and quietly aware of fear; to not act upon it, but to let it teach me about itself? Can one have the sense of withholding, restraint, to allow fear to teach me about itself, its own subtleties. Can I let fear tell me its story, with its many strands, its many subtleties? And in doing so, can I allow fear to teach me about myself?

Going to this question of what is fear, how it plays out in education, really I have to learn about fear and this is the theme in which Krishnamurti went into in many areas. What is the art of looking at myself, what is the art of looking at conflict, what is the art of looking at violence? Can I understand the way it arises, can I learn the art of holding back and letting it arise like a perfume? And you can actually see it, and let it reveal its story to you. So he is asking this in the same way, because if we are able to do it, then fear indeed can be a jewel, which can teach us to go beyond it.

Thank you.

I have one more line to say, which is worth sharing.

There was once a conversation between somebody and Krishnamurti in which he was asked, "What should I teach the children of this school?" and Krishnamurti went forth into an explanation of various things and the other person said, "No that's too much, can you make it smaller, reduce". So he did reduce it, and still the questioner said, "Even that is too much. Can you reduce further, just give me one line." And Krishnamurti did give that

person a single line, and I think that line is extraordinarily revealing. He said, “If you had to teach just one thing, teach the child not to react”. And I think that has relevance in what he has said about learning about fear. Is it possible for us to find out, to let fear tell its own story to us, and I think for that we need to learn the art of not reacting. So this is a question to all of us, it’s not something that we can teach children, we have to learn and teach it at the same time.



Questions and answers

Q: Sir, the present world is hierarchical. It has lots of differences like class, caste and other things. For a person like me, to work in the situation where there is hierarchy, where there is difference, how can I live without fear?

Alok: Maybe we can both try for some form of response. It’s a very difficult question. We know the kind of pressures hierarchy creates. I may have to respond at two levels and Shailesh can add. One is there is a way in which we internalize hierarchy when we are growing up. It is not just something which is out there, it is something which we grow up with feeling higher, lower. We feel higher against someone lower to us and there is a whole way

of thinking which I think we internalize. One just has to simply become a little sensitive to ... how I have internalized hierarchy and how I feel lower than someone else and I am feeling superior to someone else. I also like to share a section of this video which I didn't show you. The boy was asking about power. You remember that, it is directly related to your question. Parents have power over you, you know they expect something out of you, they have sent you to school for their purposes, or they have some expectations. Krishnamurti later in the film responds, and I am paraphrasing, "Look, when you are young, many of you in that situation, you have your own thinking, you have your own imagination, thoughts. Have your parents expected something of you? Well, play along with them. That is intelligence." There will be a time when you can find your own space in this complex society where you can take your own initiative. But first, we have work within our own minds and not get trapped in these hierarchies internally and secondly, to find spaces intelligently, as Shailesh said, without creating reactions and antagonisms. Because one other approach to handling hierarchy is to react against, rebel against it. Overt rebellion usually results in overt response. So there may be a way of negotiating with the hierarchy, keeping yourself intact and then find spaces to take initiative. I think that's roughly what I also think about the individual teacher who is into the structure which is hierarchical and which is governed by certain forces. What can he do? Still, I think there are plenty of possibilities to take some initiatives. Whatever the level of action you might think is necessary.... It's a very general kind of response. I don't know whether it makes sense to you...

Shailesh: I would go along with everything you said. I don't think one can battle against the things that you have described. But one has to not let them become, you know, create that very process which he described of shrinking one's brain, the feeling of pressure. I think once that process becomes a self-perpetuating thing, once you get that, pressure start to act.

Q: Is it possible to create a learning space without any rewards? For that matter any space?

Shailesh: I think it's a matter of exploration. I would respond by saying even if there are rewards to some small degree, is it possible for us not to

give them too much significance/importance, so that even if they are there, let them sit lightly on the people concerned. Because maybe there are some situations which are not within your reach. They just happen. But I think the role that we can play is to not give them importance. I would respond by saying this, rather than immediately starting by saying can we design a system completely without rewards. We may not be in that kind of position to redesign everything on our own.

Alok: You said, can we create any kind of space... and then you added learning space. What is the feeling about learning? What is it that learning means to us? I think that's a very important exploration also. Very young children when they are actually engaged in a lot of things around them, life around them, they are learning a great deal. They are not learning for rewards. They are learning because they are getting a sense of competence. They learn to walk, talk, use language, they are absorbing so many things. There is a certain form of learning which we see very naturally all around us, which does not require rewards. So, when this system of rewards starts governing the so-called learning and shapes the learning, then we may be not learning but performing. There were many speakers yesterday who spoke about it. We end up in performance and learning outcomes and so on, rather than the feeling of learning: that I understand something, I am making sense of something and I am able to do something now and so on.

Q: Something to share, related to the earlier question. When I saw the poem, I remembered something. There was this one school, one particular year, we had the education minister who was from our place, the taluka place, he was from Sirsi. Around that time, a lot of schools started calling me saying, "Please come, our students are in tension". When I went there, and as usual I asked in one classroom of 10th standard students, "Do you feel that any of you have symptoms of tension?" They were quiet. Then I spelt out in what ways tension can be seen and I was shocked to see that the entire class put up its hand for headache. I thought that it is an extreme situation. How can the entire class be burdened? Then when I spoke to the teacher, he said that the head master had been insisting on the students to do well this year. When I spoke to the head master, he said that it was very

important for the students to do very well this time as there were continuous weekly questions from the BEO's office. It is a small town and we have access, so I decided to pursue the matter. It so happened that the previous year Uttara Kannada (North Karnataka district) had ranked 2nd place in the entire 10th State board results. Now, the minister was insisting that this year we have to stand first. As I was curious, I followed up on the results the subsequent year and we went to the 22nd position!

Alok: I think we can work out the psychology of that very, very simply. The head master is demanding better results. So, it is focus on results, ranks and learning goes out of the window. Somewhere there is madness in this, but we are all caught in that madness.

Q: My first question is on building the right relationship with the intention of understanding each other. See, we also have a role to play making another person understand you, is it not? Sometimes, we are not interested in someone else, like we may not really be interested to know about them. (inaudible).

Shailesh: Well, let me respond to the first thing that you said. The word react, the content of that to me is this. Let's say we are talking and you say something, and I immediately pounce on it. That word triggers a certain reaction in me which I don't like. And I just pounce and then you pounce back and we get into an argument. So, I think very frequently we have this habit. We don't let a situation grow. We don't actually watch. We don't let something tell us about itself. It's an art ... perhaps none of us know what it is. But it's like opening something and just letting it come and reveal itself to you, rather than you demanding what it should be. That is our general tendency. That is the way we analyze things. Analysis may have a certain role. Of course it has. But, this has another kind of role and when we are talking about fears and about our own nature, violence, our own conflicts, we cannot really find out anything useful by being evasive about it. Krishnamurti is asking whether we can learn the art of attention in such a matter. And what does that mean actually? Listen to your own fears, your own nature. So, if it's in that sense, of course it is communicating with other human beings, which is also a very important thing. I won't put the label

‘reaction’ to it. Communication is very important to share your observations with somebody and so on. It has its own place.

Q: Sir, I would like to share some thoughts about rewards and punishment. It happened a week back. A few of our students went to a district level quiz competition. I ended up announcing Rs. 500 each for both the winners. Yesterday, I was talking to my colleague. I never thought of what the children would feel when they attend the competition next time. Probably they will be at a comfort level or under pressure of winning again. We reacted. As you rightly said, we reacted instantly thinking that rewards may work.

So, I also want to reflect on the same issue. We need to probably make a journey more rewarding than the reward itself. So, the journey of learning must be more rewarding. So, Ramkumar was sharing today morning with me. He saw the social science class of CFL where children had a kind of research on the history of clothes. I felt if learning could be so adventurous, this process would be more rewarding than the reward itself. So, we should probably find an answer in that. Is it for the child, does the child want the reward or is it for our satisfaction that we are giving the reward? So, it just came upon me.

Alok: It is very good that these questions have arisen. It is only when we start questioning our normal ways of doing things, maybe we come upon different ways possible also.

Q: (inaudible)

Alok: That is something so pernicious. I don't know whether you listened to Poonam Batra's lecture yesterday. Rewarding the toppers, how many other toppers - one, two, five or more? What about the rest? So, in this whole system there is no space for the whole, all of them. You are not concerned about the whole group. We are not concerned about relationship. We are not concerned with learning either.

Q: In your presentation, you said that we need to understand ourselves. What does it mean? How does one start with it? There are several questions about our life and about us as human beings. In our country, there are

several spiritual gurus. Each one of them says something different. When we hear them, we feel that everyone is right. The dilemma is who should we follow? Or is it better not to follow any of them? How to understand the self?

Shailesh: I think it's a very rich question, perhaps it needs a lot of time to discuss. One response could be it is not really important to understand the content of what different people say. Because, as it came out in these talks and so on, it is really yourself that you have to understand and by listening may be sometimes somebody talking can perhaps help in understanding. But the really important thing is not to understand the person, but to understand oneself. The real thing is can I understand my nature, my own tendencies, fearfulness, excessive attachment to something. Ultimately, no matter who is saying it, the question comes back to me. What that person says is of comparatively little significance and the real significance is me. I have to understand my own peculiarities, tendencies, if I am attached to something, fearful about something, if I hate somebody, I have to understand that. So, I have to begin with myself. So, this I think is a point which Krishnamurti himself used to bring up. It may be paradoxical that I am quoting Krishnamurti here. But he himself would say that it is not what the teacher says that is important, but it is you who are important. So, we have to begin with ourselves. Whether we listen to him or anybody else, it comes around to ourselves.

Alok: One strand that one often hears, this is very common human tendency. We are of course aware of all our emotional responses, baggages and so on, difficulties of relationship around daily life problems that we experience. We have some handle on all that, but we also keep hearing different things and we hear what may sound sometimes like *subhashitams*. This is what we should be, this is how you should be, this is the way to live a good life. There is a lot of moral pressure of a certain kind. I think if you just see this dynamic: here is my actual life, and here is this moral statement which may sometimes appeal to you a great deal also. You feel yes, it should be like that. But then, the important thing to watch there on the lines of what Shailesh was saying is that it creates a tension inside. I want to be like

that, but I am actually like this. So it catches your energies, and keeps you, and all of us face this at some point. Maybe your parents' voice, it may be a guru. So, to see these complex things that are happening in us and may be release some of the *subhashithams* and see where actually one's thoughts, feelings, responses to people are. That might release much more energy, much more feelings for other people and you may actually move more towards being affectionate. That is the problem with all the moral science classes in our schools. I think in an earlier generation we used to have moral education. But moral education is just a kind of a hat put on you. The actual head is spinning with other things. So, either you throw the hat completely or you are in tension between the two. So, going back to Shailesh, can one stay with understanding oneself in relationship?



Mala Giridhar has an MPhil in Medical and Social Psychology from the National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore. From 2005 to 2008, she has been closely associated with the work of the Akshara Foundation in Sirsi. She has conducted training programmes for anganwadi workers and school teachers who provide remedial training in government schools in Sirsi. She is also involved in the development and the running of an occupational rehabilitation centre for individuals with mental disabilities. After becoming interested in the educational vision of J Krishnamurti, she has been a counsellor at the Sahyadri School, KFI, since 2010.

Sirsi is the place where I live and work. What I am going to share with you is my own personal narrative as a member of society, as a person who has been practicing clinical psychology in Sirsi for the past 20 years, as a person who has tried to find some links between the role of early childhood experiences, education and the impact it has on one's personality, learning and therefore on life in general.

So, I will be sharing what I have experienced in the clinic and it's a very simple kind of understanding. I have been very fortunate to engage with

Sahyadri School and CFL, and my understanding about these things that I am going to share with you has been deepened by this interaction, and also by being a parent at CFL. It has allowed me to go deeper into these questions of fear, which is such an integral part of all our lives.

So, the 'fear' that we are all talking about, is it real or is it imaginary? We find in our clinic that children and adolescents are brought by their parents and we see an average of sometimes up to ten children per week. In the case of some adults who present psychological problems, we can see the role of early experiences that have affected them adversely. So I believe that we are not only talking about fear in a tentative way, in an imaginary way; it has affected all our lives. A small proportion of those who have been affected reach the clinic, and we would all agree that only those who cannot deal with it by themselves would come to a mental health centre. It is not easy to walk into a mental health center. There is stigma. There is avoidance. Despite that, the number of children and adults who come to us has made me feel that, yes, fear in a broad way, any kind of disturbance and distress that I feel within me, is real. There are people who walk into the clinic themselves, or who are brought by adults.

There is research data supporting this view. 2064 students from Bangalore, children and adolescents, were studied in diverse settings, home and school, and the prevalence rate of different kinds of distress was studied. I don't want to use the phrase 'mental illness', but different kinds of psychological distress have been diagnosed using valid and reliable indicators of mental health. The prevalence rate is as high as 12.6%. We know that reporting is less, there may be a lot of missing data. But distress is a real part of our lives and we see it in the clinic and in ourselves.

At around what age do we see the expression of these difficulties? As early as preschool. It has been shocking to me that even in a place like Sirsi, which is supposed to be semi-urban, a relatively small town, there are kindergarten-age children who are brought in with symptoms of anxiety or depression. Even before that, in the form of breath-holding spells. When the child holds the breath, everybody becomes very anxious and that actually contributes to the anxiety.

Referrals from teachers and other doctors increase around middle school when symptoms continue and almost all investigations don't lead to a diagnosis. So the first point of contact (POC) is not us, the first POC is the general practitioner. Also, in the country that we are in, there are a lot of other gurus, and many kinds of alternatives that co-exist. They are a significant majority of the health delivery system and they also see many more people than what we do.

During adolescence, sometimes they come on their own. Parents and teachers are fed up and they are looking for solutions. So, if they have gone to other sources, they may have found their solutions there, because a psychological problem can resolve itself in any number of ways. Even a placebo works, we know that. But the truth is that there are several people out there who are offering so-called solutions to these problems. And sometimes, even if there is resistance during adolescence, the children come on their own.

What are the various ways in which the fear or the psychological distress gets expressed? The earliest symptoms are typically headaches, unexplained pains, fear and avoidance of situations that involve any evaluation. By adolescence, a disconnecting happens and the severity of the symptoms increase. Disconnecting can happen in many ways, when the child fails to understand for any number of reasons. There may be reasons within or outside the child, for why the child is having difficulties in class work or with the peers or with the family or with the larger environment. When this disconnecting happens, sometimes it turns inward and there is sadness and depression. Sometimes it turns outward and there is anger. Both sadness and anger can co-exist also. We end up with a whole lot of loners or trouble-makers, or sometimes both. We see adolescents, once the disconnection has happened, gradually moving into addictions, into alcohol, and they start looking at suicide as an option and sometimes even trying it out.

Do parents experience fear or related distress? In my experience, I have found that parents experience a range of feelings like anxiety, sadness, anger about the situation and towards the child and they don't know how to respond to it. Often parents have a very superficial idea about their own

child; their understanding about the child himself is very little, as is an understanding about what is good education. The advertisements that almost all schools and colleges put up to lure parents is a sign of what works with them. So, we have these hoardings. On your way back, if you just look around, you see boards displaying the pass percentages and pictures of students. So, parents get misled by these ads and that is in their head when they are choosing a school for their child, without an understanding of what education is. They are desperate about the child getting on to the main road, education for them would mean marks and degree, job and success that they assume leads to a good life and respect. And in the middle of all these, often we find that they themselves need professional help.

Do teachers suffer from fear or related problems? In the community and also in the clinic, I find that teachers are struggling with multiple roles and responsibilities. They have a lot on their platter. As with any other subgroup, some are very committed, some are neglectful and some somewhere in the middle. But, we find that like the rest of our population, they are exerting themselves without adequate care about their own body and mind, and are exposed to the usual difficulties of corruption, sexual abuse and relationship problems. But the bureaucratic system that we live in, the kind of political environment that we live in, does not allow a person to resolve these problems in a very straightforward manner.

There is a significant minority of children and teachers who are at the receiving end of sexual abuse. Often this doesn't come out when they are children. I would like to bring in a point here that very often when they come to us as adults, at some point in our clinical interview and after we have struck up a relationship with them, they share with us these things that have been very neatly covered up when they were children or adolescents. But we have to accept that this is on our minds and we have not been able to deal with it. It is a reality and we are nowhere near looking at it and understanding it. Headaches and other body pains, anxiety and sadness are common. These are some psychosomatic complaints, and this is not only talking about teachers. The adult population, a big majority, has these problems and there are reports by the WHO that for up to 60% of the referrals

that come to the consultations, the real problem is psychological. Teachers are after all just a sub-group of that population.

What are the ways in which the system initiates or maintains fear? We see schools, preschools and colleges that encourage children to perform. And our ways of encouraging are through rewards and punishments. We have the *Pratibha Karanji* at the government level in Karnataka, we have every school giving out prizes to their students for excelling in whatever they have done, be it sports, academics and we think we are encouraging them. We use punishment or rewards. But what comes with this is what we are discussing today. There is an entire market offering solutions: tuition even for pre-schoolers even in Sirsi. This is something that is there because there is a demand. Coaching classes, memory tonics, brokering, efficiency training, you name it and you have enough of it. Yoga classes to improve concentration or motivational sessions, motivational speakers. Everything in the system is supporting this idea that one has to perform and once you perform, you will get the reward for it. You have to be something, *kuch banna hain*.

There are other 'solutions' like horoscopes, which we thought were of the past. Geetha [a teacher participant] was asking, we thought when we were children we would soon grow into a developed country, but why are we still developing and why we haven't developed? But, we are stuck in these practices and social structures that are only increasing this trend. There is a large majority of the population that is trying to gain more control over what is not in our control. Nowadays, a few channels are popularizing programmes taking one to the previous *janma* (birth) and trying to find solutions for your current day problems and fears. These methods and practices, instead of reducing our fears, offer only temporary solutions and thereby perpetuate our fears.

We put politicians, thinkers and rationalists, high up there as the models we have to emulate; and if you are growing up in a small town like Sirsi, children have to listen to several politicians and the so-called leaders and religious leaders, for the sake of motivation. Gandhi we may have forgotten a little of late, I am not sure. But there are many present favorites. Like

them you should have a goal, you have to come to their level, we should not stop till we reach the goal, have to continue to toil. Such ideals are being pumped into young minds to achieve something. This system is in place and it markets the goals to everyone. So, parents think, if our children have to achieve it, what can else can we do? If our children are not getting a prize, something is wrong with our children's fortune. Should we take the horoscope to the priest for some solutions? It is so widespread that our local newspaper in Sirsi, Lokadhwani, lists everything that is happening. For example, even my coming to this conference will be announced congratulating me, and there are people and friends who will be ready to put this up. The objective is to encourage, but it only creates in us anxiety and fear. Even before children come on the stage, their news and pictures are published in the local newspaper.

What are the outcomes? Some children make their way out of this kind of system very easily and they get enough support. But I feel that such support may harm them at some stage in their life. So some children manage to do well, and within the mainstream they become the role models that the larger majority looks up to. But some commit suicide. A 2010 statistical survey by Lancet says that approximately 45% of all suicides in India are in the 14-29 age group. This is the latest statistics. Some people drop out of the system of schooling and find their own way of living and growing. Yesterday Professor Menon was mentioning industry versus inferiority; I think those children who manage to keep within them some sense of industry, manage to get out and find something to do. Once they are out, many of them realize that the stress was not necessary. But some barely manage to scrape through the same system and then start aspiring for their own children, and the cycle repeats itself. And here is a very sad population which is always trying to become something or getting their children to become something.

What can be done? We are not looking at solutions, but still at what is possible, what can we do in the present circumstances. Can we step back and see what is happening? We may not find direct answers for these questions, but for a moment can we stand back and observe what is happening and

ask, what are the different things that give a true meaning to life? Is there importance for sharing and caring as much as the importance money gets? Does learning mean being able to put on a display, compete, win? Learning seems to be all about showing what we have done. Most educated people even in the medical fraternity, in educational institutions, are so preoccupied with publishing papers, getting them in particular journals, seeing that these are published and quoted. More and more of display, competing and winning and being visible seems to be the most important thing in life. Is it? What will be my state of mind if I am doing this every day, ever since I can remember? Till now what I have learnt is putting on display, showing that I can do it, winning. And what is going to be my state of mind? What are the chemicals that would be working there?

What can be done? I came across a book recently by Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, and the rest of my presentation is inspired by it. Palmer takes the teachers on an inner journey, towards reconnecting with their vocation and their students, and recovering their passion for one of the most difficult and important of human endeavours. The book builds on a simple premise. 'Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique. Good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher'. Integrity of the teacher means that we are not again talking about the ideal of a person with integrity. Rather, we mean everything within me coming together. I am a person who is fearful, but I can also gather the courage to do what I can. I am a good person, yet I have treated people badly knowingly or unknowingly. Can we as human beings accept these different aspects of our lives? When this happens, it is beautiful. And I have been very fortunate to work with people with mental retardation. Because, here I have seen what connectedness, affection can be, and a change that it can bring even to people with mental retardation. The change happens in the body, mind and spirit and there is a wholesomeness that comes to these individuals that I did not come across in any textbook that I learnt from. But I saw this unfold only when the right environment was in place.

Palmer points out that when we consider teaching, we often begin with the 'What' question. What subject shall we teach? When we delve deeper, we

ask the ‘how’ question. What are the methods to teach well? Next, we ask the ‘why’ question. For what purposes and ends do we teach? But rarely, if ever, do we ask the ‘who’ question, who is the self that teaches, how does the quality of my self form, or reform the way I relate to my students, my subjects, my colleagues, my world? How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes?

I am very happy that this was the same point that came towards the end of Poonam’s talk. That with all the big picture understanding of things, it is from within that we have to teach, and it is only with an understanding of the within and the outside that we will be able to do this.

A familiar phrase from Krishnamurti comes to mind here. ‘Don’t ask how. Find out for yourself’.

Questions and Answers

Q: You mentioned a very startling statistic about suicide. One of course is to understand the source of this, what survey has been done and secondly, do the reasons for these suicides vary across different strata of society? Just would like to get some understanding of that.

A: Actually all of those questions get answered in this, because I feel it is a very relevant source, published in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry and relatively recent, 2010. And more than one lakh lives are lost every year due to suicides in India. In the last three decades, the suicide rate increased by 43% and the rates are same in that period from 1985-95, there was an increase of 35% from 1995-2005. However, the male- female ratio has been stable. There is a wide variation in suicide rates within the country. The southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, AP and TN are higher. This variable pattern has been stable for the last 20 years. Higher literacy, better reporting system, lower external aggression, higher social and economic status and higher expectations are the possible explanations for the higher suicide rates in the southern states.

And this is what we see every day in the clinic with adolescents with the burden of expectations, the parents are not willing to listen. Professor

Menon told us about the story of a mother who committed suicide and that burden of expectation was so high. It is very difficult.

Q: I am a special educator. Is it good to involve the child after assessment, to tell him/her regarding the problems? Should a teacher tell or not tell the problem at all?

A: For every good and bad, we have to understand in the context. Where there is care, and where there is a genuine attempt at helping, that will get communicated. We give, we want, an elaborate report, with labels with different kinds, you know this whole thing about being professional. What it has also led to is thick reports of people, they write stuff that just make the parent and the child feel 'Oh! what is happening?'. This is a very western system, and I am sure that is going to kind of come up when Sonali talks. But we have inherited from the west, that we have to write a report in this way and then give it to somebody in this way. But what it does is, it alienates us from the child and from the problem.

If we sit with the child and say what is happening, the child will start sharing and the problems will come up and then we can nicely discuss what the problems are. There may be other people in the community who may show different responses that are unhealthy. But we can talk to them as well. That is why, understanding our work and ourselves through work and through relationship is crucial. So, in my relationship with that child and my relationship with the others in question, can I cut across to the teacher and ask? So, the problem gets demystified. We all have difficulties. There are good ways to go about it, without getting into too much jargon and I thank the Krishnamurti schools and the people involved in the Krishnamurti schools for helping me get out of that professionally. I think it is important that we do it.



Dr Sonali Nag is a clinical psychologist trained at the National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) and is currently a visiting academic at the University of Oxford (UK). She also leads the Department of Early Childhood and Primary School Programmes at The Promise Foundation, a charity that works in the field of literacy and livelihoods. In the last decade, she has successfully completed two large scale language and reading programmes in Kannada and English. In 2009 she was the recipient of the Royal Society and British Academy's Newton International Fellowship. She is currently coordinating an international team of scholars to establish the current evidence-base for what works in the teaching of language, literacy and numeracy in developing countries. A recent interest is to understand what it is about smart phones that so fascinates children as young as two and three! Dr Nag has written widely on a variety of themes, including literacy development and education, dyslexia and early childhood education.

Thank you for inviting me. I would like to share some of the work I have done with The Promise Foundation and with the University of Oxford. As you might have gathered, I started my career as a clinical psychologist, and

one of the first things I realized is that a referral very often speaks about the school or the home more than about the child. We are trained to elicit what is called the 'presenting complaint'. And when I was invited here, one of the things I did was to go through the 'presenting complaints' list of every child I have met in my clinic since 2001.

Going through my notes, I noticed that some schools have stopped referring to me! So, I did a bit of thinking and it was clear that they didn't like my reports. There does seem to be an assumption of what a clinical psychologist can deliver. And I found that there are schools that I have opted not to ever accept a referral from, because the school has decided to use the clinical psychologist's report to drop the child... ask the child to leave. So, as someone who is not part of a school, but very intimately involved with children and their schooling, I find that one of the parameters of school culture is: what they think a clinical psychologist can do for them. Typically, many schools think that we will help them to get rid of the under-performing child. This is just as a background to this talk.

We set up The Promise Foundation more than 25 years ago. We were trained in clinical psychology, we decided we did not want to sit in a clinic and attend to children after they had really broken down under what the world was offering them. We were very keen to be out in the community. We were very keen to look at positive mental health and not ill health, and this has been our mission: positive mental health, education and potential realization. It is these same key points that have guided my preparation for today's presentation as well. I start by looking at some of the notes I make in my clinic, and extracting excerpts to share with you.

Self talk: what do children tell themselves?

[The sub-titles in my slides are taken from calligraphy in the chitara style done by children in the Bangalore Corporation Schools.]

Often, self-talk is talk that might be an imitation of somebody else which then the child makes his or her own. At other times, the talk does not seem to be linked to anybody outside of themselves, but seems to stem from their

own understanding of how the world is treating them. I want to highlight here that these extracts of self-talk in my notes come not just from children who are breaking down under stress, but also from children who have used self-talk as a trigger to perform better. I think there is something about the paradox of self-talk that we need to keep in mind, that children who are going through a period of fear might actually strengthen themselves over that period of fear, and come back with better coping skills and greater emotional wellbeing. So, trying to take fear out entirely may be a simplistic way of dealing with children and childhood.

Here is another example. This is a child who was using introspection, and this is one of the things that stood out from her writing: 'Not sure why I stopped doing well. I could not understand why some teachers picked on me... not sure why...'. 'Not sure' is a theme I have heard across different age groups. One of my first clients was a child who was four. When I asked, "Ok Jai, so what is happening?", all Jai could tell me is, "What can I tell you?" That brings me to one of the toughest aspects of understanding the experience of fear, and that is the absence of a language with which to share it with someone else. It is my sense that our curriculum is failing to give our children the linguistic nuance with which they can negotiate their mental health requirements. I will come back to this, but this is something that I am picking up over and over again most dramatically: the absence of native-like fluency, the killing-off of mother tongues. The fact that our linguistic proficiency is utterly superficial will have direct implications on our mental health proficiencies. That is something to highlight.

Self-talk has a way of being repetitive. It just comes back unasked for, unbidden, unheralded. A lot of this self-talk is about not having done well enough and my clinic notes suggest that it does not always have to be because others want more from you. There are certain personalities for whom it is not the external drivers that cause the fear. At the same time, there is the other point: that fear can stem from one's own perception and does not always have to be the second hand of a clap. It could be something that is coming from within.

And of course, a lot of my clinic notes reflect a child's silent cry for help,

not knowing whom to turn to, having reposed confidence in some people and realized they were the ‘other’ and not amongst us. I don’t mean the cry for help from children with florid symptoms, that is not what I am bringing to you. I don’t mean children who fulfill diagnostic criteria, because that is not the nature of all referrals. A lot of the referrals are of children who have no clinical syndrome, no anxiety or emotional disorder. I am talking of the day-to-day living of children, and the push within our society to go for professional help. As an aside, I remember one year where I was very, very popular in the cocktail circuit! Where mothers said to each other, ‘You haven’t been to her?’ and the next day I would get a phone call. They had to see “this” clinical psychologist, she was the flavour of the year. It was a relief when I went out of fashion! A clinical psychologist can often lose his or her role as a helping professional. You can become a marketplace. But returning to children who in fact struggle to cope, there are two kinds of reactions. One is a sense of failure, to anticipate failure, to essentially say in so many words: *I think I can’t do this*. The other reaction is to constantly expect others to judge one negatively: *Whatever I do, what is the point? Others will see it as negative*. Indeed, often when told a child is ‘careless’ or ‘lazy’, I wonder if the child has just given up. The child is not participating, just jumping ahead, knowing that the consequences of not doing well are not as bad as the consequences of being thought of as not good.

There is yet another child whose mother, father and even teacher will report: *he is a cool guy, I have never known him to be anxious*. Even when you meet the child, talk to him, he says, “I don’t get anxious.” But the meeting may proceed in other directions:

I ask him: “... you have butterflies in your stomach?”

Child: “No, I don’t have any tightening feeling in my stomach.”

I say: “Ok. Do you feel that there are things happening to you that do not happen to other children?”

Child: “Yea, the only thing is when I am working... I just wonder about how others are finishing before me in the exam hall.”

And then slowly it starts tumbling out. These are children who are hyper-vigilant, constantly using others as their ‘point people’.

Another aspect of fear is seen in instances where the child is close to collapse with fatigue because she is trying too hard. Here are children whose mothers tell me, “Please ask her to go out and play. She is just continuously studying...” Perhaps you might have that profile of child in your classrooms: over-diligent and unable to bring joy into what they are doing. For these children, the joy has gone out and the performance has begun to reign supreme.

So, what does school culture have to do with all these themes in self-talk? I think a lot. My clinical notes show that while about 50% of the reason for stress in a child may be home-related (events like divorce in the family, a new sibling being born), a lot of the stress is related to the school. For example, a child moved from a liberal school in Mumbai to a very, very conservative school in the heartland of Tamil Nadu. There was a difference in the school cultures of these two institutions and locations. Here by school culture I mean the nature of chat in the playground, the nature of chat in the staff room. I am talking of those intangible, omnipresent processes which make up a school. I wrote a note to myself saying this child is having problems with peer relations, and we need to really look closely to see it doesn't deteriorate. The child was being called ‘too forward’, but she was just being a Mumbaikar. She had come from Mumbai, she was just being like she had been in Mumbai. But in the heartland of Tamil Nadu, that was just not on. She was already, at the age of 12, being looked upon as perhaps of ‘loose character’. But this is what schooling can do to children. In addition, the 12 year old was living with her conservative grandparents and that too was not helping.

Chasing that perfect score is a very specific hidden theme in referrals from certain schools. Here are those children who are not catching up with school-dictated norms of performance. These norms are not in play outside of the particular school and yet these unique norms become the world for the children of that school, with parents competing to meet school ‘standards’. What stands out in such a setting is the child who is doing her best. If you remove her from that school system, she is a high-achieving child, though within that school, she is only looked upon as belonging to the bottom 15%. In this instance, the fear experienced by the child is a normal

reaction to an abnormal situation. Fear sometimes flags for us that the situation has to change, rather than the inference that the child has to learn better coping. At the same time, sometimes, the reporting of fear flags the important message that the child is overreacting to a normal situation; that she needs to learn better coping.

What I present from my clinic is anecdotal, and is perhaps flavoured by all my biases. What I will present next is not anecdotal, but still might reflect all my biases! This is some research that I have been doing for the last four years now. This project solicited international bids to collate evidence about foundational learning in low income countries. Most of the bidding agencies were universities from high income countries! I did put in a bid, and then we did win it. And when I went in for the briefing, I was told: *Just give us a synthesis of what is known from high income countries and we will feed it to the low income countries.* Now, that is the politics of what is happening at the highest levels. Feed us with what is known from contexts that are culturally and contextually distant, and therefore completely inappropriate. *Give it to us in an accessible language.* So at this point we could have lost our project, if we were to say 'no'. But we said that if we are doing a synthesis, it will be of work that has come out of low income countries. We were told that we won't get quality work; it will not cut the quality standards needed for this synthesis. I said, "Let us give it a try. Let us see where there is quality work." This is mainly because of my experience of meeting absolutely high caliber researchers in India. India is quite high in terms of the number of papers with high quality standards. So, we finally won to keep our work plan and what I am sharing with you next is a synthesis from select strands in this project.

Scripted routines, language loss and other sources of alienation

A synthesis of high quality educational research from low and middle income countries shows some remarkable trends. These trends are seen in studies using ethnography and quantitative methodologies. What comes through is children's experience of alienation. First, we find many children being alienated from their intuitive learning processes by scripted learning routines. A scripted learning routine is found in ready-made lesson

plans that are handed over to the teacher, and the teacher just works with it without questioning the 'script'. Other sources of classroom routines that alienate the child come from further afield from 'consultants'. It seems that the more low income a country is, the more there is this hegemony of consultants who come in to tell exactly what to do. In such instances, the teacher's voice is not heard; the variations they know must appear in classroom routines are not incorporated into the lesson plan. Second is the tsunami of the school language that obliterates all neighbourhood languages. For example, our wish for English is killing off all our mother tongues. More importantly, it is killing off our multi-linguality. We have children who are not good in any of the languages around them. Such loss has very strong implications for emotional well-being. If the linguistic tools to communicate distress are not available, then the only tools left to communicate distress and fear is through the physical.

I will illustrate the two points (scripted routines and language loss) from two strands in our review. One is a research synthesis of studies on mathematical reasoning and numeracy development, and the other is about the home environment.

Mathematical learning. We looked at mathematical learning from preschool up to Standard 2. The psychometrically oriented surveys had captured individual differences in children's attainments on tangible, performance-based outcomes: *Can children subtract? How quickly can they subtract? How good is their concept of place value?* In contrast, the ethnographies described in detail the talk around these concepts, and this gave us deep insights about how language use and classroom routines shape the genesis of fear. The teachers are too abstract, so children do not understand a word. The child is distanced from math learning and it is a distancing that is twice-removed. First, the teacher's language is abstract and difficult to comprehend, and second because what is being taught is in no way like the use of numbers in the child's real life. A double whammy!

Our synthesis also shows a lot of tension and conceptual confusion in the child. One tension is that children have a natural sense of numerosity, they come with an intuitive sense of ways to look at numerical problem solving.

At school, however, scripted methods and routines replace these intuitive ways. This is as true in low income as in middle income countries, and in government schools, as well as low fee paying or private schools. In fact, some of the worst perpetrators of this alienation are the private schools, because there is a sense of the private school knowing it all, and parents feeling that they need to submit to the number-routines promoted by schools.

There is however good evidence to show that all cultures have sophisticated ways of dealing with numerosity; intuitive, linguistic analogies with which they communicate numerical logic to the young. None of this is however brought into the classroom. Indeed when you ask the child of six, "Ok, tell me what is going on?" a beautiful (and insightful) dialogue ensues: "Aunty, should I do it the way my mother taught me, or the way my teacher taught me?" This is a reality for many four to six year olds, and such choice-making is much more in the field of math than language, social science or environment science. "Should I do the counting like this or should I do it in my mind?" A related point from the synthesis is about the language; children saying, "Can I think in Kannada and tell you?". So, legitimizing which language you can think in has also been completely taken over by the school system.

Home environments. I think there are large chunks of society who believe that schools will take their children into the future. They repose trust in schools. They believe that you have the skills they don't have. I think this belief was there from the outset. So, when my grandmother did not manage to go to school and could send my mother to school in Bangladesh, the belief was that my mother would get what my grandmother did not get. When my mother came into English very late, she decided I should go to an English medium school from pre-school. She believed that the school would give me what I should get.

But an incomprehension about the school has been mounting, an incomprehension that seems to stem from an increasingly arrogant school system. The research synthesis we have done on home environments has examined ethnographies of how parents are teaching children at home. We also looked at home-school linkages, and the data show quite a few

things. Home environments typically try to reproduce school demands. A lot of homes reconfigure their evening time, their holiday time, to what schools think they should be doing. So, schools have an amazingly insidious impact on all aspects of family life. A lot of schools send in notes and expect parents will know what to do. It is clear that the assumptions that the schools are making are not with any ill intent; it is often an assumption of a partnership. But there are also schools where the assumption is out of sheer lack of awareness of the child's home, and that there might be issues at home that can't allow for the school's expectations to be upheld. One of the biggest issues is that many homes and schools have an uneasy relationship. So, when we say 'worlds of fear', I think we are also looking at the worlds of fear amongst the adults who have come together to engage in 10 years of schooling for the child.

End Note

I have tried to draw together two aspects: One, that school cultures influence the potential realization of the child. In other words, potential realization does not just depend on the strengths and weaknesses that the child brings along but can very often be explained by environmental and school culture related variables. The other thesis that I have tried to place for your consideration is that school cultures may or may not give any credence to the linguistic and cultural heritage of the child. Within the larger fabric of society, schools are meant to also keep the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country. But schools very often are the worst homogenisers! At the same time, we have found that children in schools that have a sense of every child's individuality have more emotional wellbeing. So obviously, school cultures are also predicting how you are going to cope later in life.

I think the people in this audience, many of whom I have known for years, have been pioneers in shaking up the system. You have taken marginalized ideas and managed to bring them into the mainstream. The point is to bring these matters of emotional wellbeing and potential realization into the national discourse, into the mainstream discourse. It is an honour to be invited to share some of the findings from my work. I look to learn from

the discussions that we have. With that I will stop and if you have any questions, I am happy to take them.

Questions and answers

Q: You said that the wish for English is killing off all the other languages. At the same time, you can't wish away the wish for English. It is just too strong a momentum. And of course, everyone looks to audiences like us, that you are all able to speak in English...So, is there a way to approach this whole question of owning English as a new language, without killing off the other languages? What are your thoughts on that?

A: I have found in my recent work with about 400 families—just being with them from when the child is four till when the child is eight. Watching, for example, the story telling patterns at home we found that parents are giving up home-language stories and trying to read from English books. This is because they think that is the way in which the child can do well in English. So it really means killing off home-language practices. If a school can basically say, “We will take care of English, you take care of the home language”, at least we are going somewhere. But often the school says, “We will take care of English. You help us and make sure English is still happening outside school.” Then, what is the home to do?

Q: You spoke about home-school relationship. From yesterday, we have spoken enough about government teachers, private teachers, the difficulties they face, and even children. What we have not touched enough is fear of parents. It is about the school and the parent community. I want to deal in depth about that also. When we speak of a child-friendly environment in the school, it should also be teacher- and parent-friendly in order to make the child feel comfortable. So, most of the time, we call the parents to talk about the child, the parent comes with fear of what we might say about their child. Most often than not, they expect some bad complaint about the child than giving suggestion. I really want to touch that area, how to engage parents effectively, so the confusion we have within us teachers and parents, is not transferred to the child. Having good communication with parents, school and the community could also play a good role in making

the school environment free from fear. And that could be part of school culture also.

A: I have to say I am not the best person to strategize for this, because I am not in the thick of a parent - teacher situation. Let me start with this slip that was given to a child in Sarjapura village the day before and her parent, who is not literate, asked me to read it.

'Dear parent, tomorrow there will be a science exhibition, sports day for students and parents. The entire parent must participate without fail. Gents - tug of war, ladies - garland making. For that, all the mothers must bring jasmine flower and thread. The function will start by 9 am. Van facility available.'

Two things struck me. Here was a HM who had figured out two activities for his parent community which would be within their skill set. He knew he could not get enough jasmine flowers, so he made sure that they bring the flowers. Of course, the Sarjapura area is known for jasmine flowers and so we know that many can actually source the flowers. Here was an intuitive attempt at connecting with the parents of the school. The HM was not planning any parent-teacher meetings. But when all the parents had gathered, he stood up and harangued them to stop watching television: "You all stop watching television. Play with your child." So, it turned out to be one of those moral sessions!

But, returning to your question, I think there is a dramatic increase of parents who are fearful of schools and you need to address this. Parents are your primary client group and they are your main partners in the education process. But they tend to feel a sense of awe at your expertise or a sense of incomprehension about those jargon-filled lectures you give them. So, it might be a good idea to think about the parent who is struggling the most, and talk to the parent: *what is it about our communication that does not reach you?* They might actually say: *you are over-complicating matters for us, our family lives are getting completely taken over by your expectations.*



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Thank you very much! This is such a fantastic campus you have here and this morning walk was absolutely spectacular. I conquered one minor fear today which is that of clambering up rocks and not looking back in case I slide backwards. It was a good start for the day.

The brain is a fairly complex organ, one of the least understood in our body and yet, we do know quite a bit about how we do motor control, we know a fair bit about sensation, we know a reasonable amount about talents, we know about circuits regulating learning. But we know the least about circuits that regulate love, joy, attachment, humour. I would find it hard to

tell you which part of your brain produces the ability to laugh at a joke, but I can tell you which part of the brain is responsible for my moving my hands, my arms, my being able to stand here and talk. For complex emotions, we really have a relatively poor understanding of the circuits in the brain that drive those kinds of behaviours. So, we use animal models, and we are limited in the extent of what emotional spectrum we can study in our animal models. But what we are interested in understanding are circuits that are well conserved across evolution. All animals feel fear, it is a very conserved behavioural circuit. In particular, I am interested in how life experience modulates the development of these circuits, which are generated based on genetic blueprints. Life constantly educates these circuits to fine tune them such that you finally produce behaviour that is appropriate to your environment. And so, environment is in constant dialogue with the brain modulating these circuits.

So, let us go back all the way even before there is a brain. Let us go back to single cell. And one asks is there any possibility that fear might have an impact when you don't even have a brain? Is there a possibility that fear has the chance to impact the brain when the brain does not exist?

Well, there is evidence now that it can. The experiences of the parents or the grandparents are encoded as chemical modifications in the genome either as methylation events or acetylation events or as phosphorylation events, upstream of the genes. Genes are long stretches of deoxyribonucleic acid. We have a total of 46, that is 23 pairs, half from mother and half from father. The code is essentially ATGC in a scrambled order within these chromosomes. You have essentially information that you have inherited when the egg and sperm comes together, carrying half information from the mother and half information from the father. Now, in addition to this information, how you can express that information can also be inherited, and that is epigenetics. You can change how much of that gene will be expressed or not. Now, this is at a level of control more than what we have inherited. It tells you, you have inherited this, but you are going to decide how much of this will be expressed. You can titrate the expression of the gene.

Let me put this into context. I will do it with a recent experiment from last year, by Kerry Ressler and Brian Dias. He took mice and exposed them to an odour which was neutral, not one that was appetitive, animals don't like it particularly. They were utterly neutral to it. But he paired it with a shock. Once you pair an odour with a shock, the shock makes the odour aversive. So, now you associate this odour with a shock, the animal will go everywhere but in the direction of that odour. So, he trained these mice to do essentially what is called 'fear conditioning'. Now in the absence of the shock, forever this odour is going to be highly aversive.

Post this, 2-3 weeks later, he allowed them to inseminate, so they fertilized a few females. And then he looked at the grandchildren of the mice. Their grandfathers had the shock, but their parents had no shock, and no odour after that...and then he studied the grandchildren. And what you find is those animals who are the grandchildren, both males and females, now have an aversive response to this odour which they had never smelt, and have never experienced paired with a shock!

So, how does this even happen? This is your grandfather who had this experience, two generations are over, and now you are responding to this odour like it is traumatizing you. It turns out that the particular odour is detected by a receptor in the olfactory bulb of the mice, and there is a small amount of brain territory dedicated to that receptor. With the shock training, that territory in the brain expands, and changes its degree of connections with the amygdala, which is one of the primary fear circuits in the brain. Now two generations down, these grandchildren mice have an expanded representation of that receptor in their brain and as a result, they are associating this with strong aversive odour.

This is fascinating because in some sense, one is beginning to understand where innate and learned fears come from. Take for example a rat or a mouse which has never seen a cat in its life, and none of whose grandparents have ever seen a cat (because they have been bred in captivity in the 'animal house' research lab). If I were to bring cat urine and dab it on a little cotton ball and put it in the cage, all the animals will freeze, because cat odour is an innate fear for rodents. So how do learnt fears translate into

becoming innate fears? This is fascinating for us because it tells us there is a layer of information here that we had completely and utterly missed. This epigenetic programming of trans-generational inheritance of responses or behaviours had been just ignored. We had totally not looked at it.

Imagine now a one month old human foetus. There are 10,000 cells in the brain at one month. And now there is the most dramatic explosion of cell division that you can ever imagine. In this critical window, what you are exposed to, the levels of stress hormones in the mother's bloodstream for example, do programme your brain. The brain is sensing its environment rapidly already at this point in time. The effect of the stress hormones on the brain is to shape how the baby's circuits are eventually going to form. Think of a recipe book, one which has produced all of us. All of us have a prefrontal cortex, a visual cortex, and everyone here has located functional circuits similarly. There is not a single person in this room who has decided to put their visual cortex somewhere else. This tells us that the recipe book is really quite invariant. And yet, look at the individual variation in how we process life, feel emotion and so on. That is where life experience comes into the picture. In this early prenatal window, experience, hormones, viruses, material infections and so on can interfere, modify or they can tweak with the process of forming brain circuits.¹

This circuit is now sensing the world. And as it senses its world, it predicts a future world it may inhabit. And based on that, it titrates its responses to be ideally suited for a future world it may occupy. So, if you have a large degree of stress in early life, it is predicting that your life is really going to be stressful. Better have every stress pathway on full alarm, because you are going to make use of it all the time. That is why you engineer a circuit that is far more prone to give you high response.

The period in which you do this predicting is called the critical period.

- 1 But let me make a clear cut statement that all deterministic statements are dangerous. It does not mean that someone getting pregnant should worry about a cold that they get. Our deterministic statements are problematic as far as the brain is concerned, because there is a huge degree of plasticity in the brain. The ability of change here is so dynamic that it is dangerous to make a categorical, deterministic statement.

Critical periods are those windows of time in which your brain is particularly prone to taking information from the environment to adjust its synaptic contact, its strengths, its function in a sense. So during those windows is really when the genetic blueprint is adjusting itself based on experience. Critical windows are different for different circuits. For example, there is a critical window for learning language. You try to learn a second language when you are 25, you will learn it, but it will be a struggle. If you try to learn four languages when you are under 7 or 8, you will do it without a problem.

It is much the same for motor control. There are critical periods in which fine motor control is coming into place, so if you have got three year-olds or four year-olds doing cursive writing, you are trying to do something that the system is not sensorially prepared for at all. It was not oriented to doing cursive writing at three or four. You don't have fine motor control yet, so if you accelerate it, you will have changes in the circuit as a consequence, because the brain is preparing itself based on what it sees. There are critical period windows of this kind, and we know them best for those parts of the brain that do sensation, for touch and for vision.

So what do we know about critical period? For example, if you look at new born mice, there is the mum and you can see her vibrissae and those are whiskers. That's her fingers. This is the biggest representation in the rat brain. Like we have for our fingers, they have for their whiskers because they whisk and explore their world. So, whisking is what they do and that's why they run around so effectively and know it is a corner, because they just do this and figure it out. Now, if you don't have these whiskers, in that early window then you don't develop the representation for it in the brain. Because you basically decided 'I am not getting any information from the periphery'. So I am not going to waste territory in my brain for this information, it will go to something else. So, experience has that powerful an effect. The most dramatic example is the eye shutting example. So if you occlude an eye during the early window, you are blind from it, nothing is wrong with your retina. You open the eye after the critical period, you are functionally blind. You can see light, no problem. So if you are actually looking for recorded responses from the eye, absolutely normal. You just

lost territory in the brain. Because the brain said I did not get any information from this eye for three months, I am not wasting space on this, let the other eye take over. So gone. Now, you open the eye, you can do nothing about it. So this is what the brain is essentially doing. It is taking in information and saying is it useful to me or not and if it is not, I am not wasting space on it. That is exactly what happens. And this was the discovery for which Hubel and Weisel received their Nobel. Because essentially children who are born with cataracts, they never did cataract surgeries on babies because it seemed too traumatic. But if you leave the cataract in there, it is like a functional blindness for months and years and if you do it later, nothing is wrong with the eye, but the brain is not going to take any input from that eye which is useless, which is why input is such a critical programme on the brain. What you do sensorily shapes your brain. Much the same way, we know that monkeys need consistent social contact. If they are peer isolated, a stress pathway is developed that is completely haywire. And I will show you what actually happens.

What we know from the realm of psychiatry and psychology is that abuse, neglect and trauma in the early window has life-long consequences on behaviour and development and risk for disease. Risk for disease is not for only psychiatric disease, but also for heart disease, diabetes and so on. In fact, abuse and neglect are the greatest precipitators of vulnerability to poor health outcomes. So, what do we do? We try to mimic this in animal models to mechanistically understand what is actually happening in the brain as a consequence of experience. So I am going to tell you about work from looking at inherent differences in maternal care. This model is one that was put forth by Michael Meaney. They took a large number of rats and observed the way they do maternal care. And they binned behaviour into categories. For example, the number of nursing bouts, or the way the nursing bout takes place. The mother may sit on top of the pups, nurse and care for them and when she does that, she has lots of opportunity to lick and groom. Or there is the passive position which is lying on the side and the pups can feed, but there is less room for active licking and grooming. So some pups were given what he called higher maternal care, which essentially meant they had the same number of nursing bouts, but much more

licking, grooming and arch-back nursing. And they showed decreased fear and stress responses as compared to the others that got the same number of nursing bouts (so no nutritional deprivation), but a very different form, of less licking, less grooming, less arch-back nursing. In fact the pups who had higher maternal care also showed increased learning through life, and had less aging-related neuronal damage. So there were very long lasting consequences.

What is the stress response? The hypothalamus in your brain activates the pituitary, which activates your adrenal glands, to secrete cortisol or corticosterone. The most effective way to get a very rapid cortisol response in humans is to get them to do rapid mental math. Unless they had a really nice math teacher—we should do it with all CFL students to see if they are programmed differently! But in general, for 99% of the world's population, if you get them to do rapid mental math with a clock ticking, you will get a nice cortisol peak. We secrete cortisol, it is our fight-or-flight, essential, survival hormone. Without this, we cannot function. So, if you don't have cortisol, it is disaster. But you also need to turn it off. It is one of those hormones that does so many things. It changes glucose utilization, sends it to your muscles because it is preparing for running off somewhere or fighting. It prepares your immune system because essentially you are expecting to be attacked, hit or injured. So, you get immune system mobilization - macrophages, mast cells and everything heading outward. You shut off digestion, because at that moment, digestion is irrelevant. Reproduction system also shuts down because again reproduction is irrelevant.

This is what cortisol does...but, we are not switching it on in the savannas anymore. Tiger or lion is not running after us, and we are switching on the cortisol response when we are not getting a job, or when somebody did not like something on Facebook, or somebody was mean to you which you have no control over. A hormone which was beautifully designed, but not for the world we live in today. If you don't switch it off, you will bathe your brain with cortisol sustainedly. So, the most critical thing is, how do you switch it off? It turns out that corticosterone gets to the brain very quickly. In the brain, there is a structure called the hippocampus which has receptors for

the cortisol: glucocorticoid receptors. They get activated and the hippocampus shuts off your hypothalamus, saying, “Ok, you don’t need to be active anymore”. Nice feedback control system, and that is why the peak is within 20 minutes, and it is in decay very quickly after that.

So, the rats with higher maternal care have very nicely engineered feedback control. They end up with much more glucocorticoid receptors on their hippocampus because of which the entire pathway can be switched off very quickly. The rats who get low levels of care, end up with lower number of glucocorticoid receptors on their hippocampus, and as a consequence, this pathway tends to be active for longer.

Now, if this is true, what happens if we adopt? Everybody was identical at birth. You have been inbred for 40 generations. But now, you want to flip in one generation. So what you do is, you take the pups which were born to high care givers who have been inbred, and you adopt them to low care givers. And you take low cared pups and adopt them to high care givers, and see what happens to the hippocampus. And this is what happens. Pups born to low care givers, but adopted to high care givers, have high numbers of receptors. Pups born to high care givers and raised by high care givers have anyway high number of receptors. And pups born to high care givers, but now fostered by low care givers, their number of receptors drops. Pups born to low care givers and adopted by low care givers have a low number of receptors.

Now, why does this even matter? Why is it even relevant to change the amount of receptor levels? If you sustainedly bathe your brain with corticosterone or cortisol, you will kill hippocampal neurons, because they are rather vulnerable. So, if you bathe the brain repeatedly over and over again with cortisol, you will start destroying the hippocampal neurons. You destroy them, there is a lack of ability to shut down the stress response. This will increase the amount of corticosterone...which will kill more neurons! So, this is a positive feedback loop which can go completely haywire. And essentially once it starts, it has the possibility to become completely self-sustaining, so that you end up with elevated cortisol baseline and an inability to shut off cortisol when there is stress. There is brain imaging data from

a children's hospital, they have studied brains of children from Romanian orphanages: the inherent amount of activation, and even the size of the hippocampus, is greatly compromised.

Questions and answers

Q: (Inaudible)

A: Habit, or something that is very easily doable, or repetitive, does not really challenge the brain much. It is novelty that challenges the brain, and the other big driver is emotion. Let us do a little exercise. Close your eyes for a second, everybody. Think about two faces, two teachers from your first 10 years in school. First two that come to your mind, don't use your brain too much. Open up your eyes! How many of you remembered somebody whom you absolutely loved? How many of you remembered somebody that you absolutely hated?...Surprisingly low, it is usually the other way around. It is interesting! You guys have had extremely good educational experiences. I am really happy to hear that.

Fear is the biggest driver of recall, because our inherent brain is driven for survival, and so we remember individuals who traumatized us, unfortunately rather well. We also remember people we love. So, that is the other positive element. So, you are remembering people you liked! The subjects you loved are often directly associated with individuals you really had affection for, and something that you hate for the rest of your life maybe associated with an individual you don't like. But fear is a big driver unfortunately.

Q: Thank you very much for this very interesting presentation and I just have two questions. Firstly, in your presentation you mentioned that fear is the biggest driver for recall and this sounds quite contradictory to what I have heard in the last few days. We have been speaking like how fear is actually a hindrance for learning. So, my question is, from the psychological point of view, does it mean that fear has some value, especially when we consider that recall and memory is one of the key aspects of learning?

A: Yes, I mean fear is a great driver of *fear* learning. I should just put the fear in front of learning. Fear is great driver of *fear* learning. It is no

wonder, it is one of the fundamental emotional circuits in the brain. It is our survival circuit, and we use it to remember what we should avoid, and what we should be doing to escape, or learn to remember dangerous things. It is how you learn to avoid fire, kids learn very quickly, there are some very, very effective circuits for that. But if you are asking in terms of general cognition, all it does is slip whatever you want to cognitively remember into fear learning. And then it becomes less about the events you want to remember, all it does is to very beautifully produce a very rapid cortisol fear flight response. It is like taking neutral odour that they did with the mouse experiment, it is like an irrelevant odour and you just converted that into an aversive odour. So, fear is a very strong driver of aversive learning. You will remember forever that it was traumatic. You tend to remember your traumatic experiences extremely well, you may not remember anything else associated, you just create a fear response. But does that give you cognitive learning of a broader kind? Far from it, all it does is takes away all that is there in that domain, and convert it into an aversive circuit. Essentially anything neutral, even appetitive, even good or wonderful, can be rapidly converted into aversive stimulus—if you pair it strongly with fear, you will move into the aversive space. It is the most powerful circuit in terms of being able to take everything else and siphon it into an aversive space. And unfortunately, it has been used very effectively by many educators, sorry!

Q: (Inaudible)

A: Depends on the severity of the fear experienced. Yes, fear memories can be extinguished. So, that is an active process unlike forgetting. Fear memories often don't as easily disappear with just forgetting. You have to actually, actively, get rid of them—which means you have to extinguish the fear memory. This means you have to pair whatever has now been moved into the aversive space, with something sufficiently positive to move it out. That is how we do it with rodents. So you pair an odour with a shock, and now if you want to teach the animal that odour is *not* aversive, you will have to pair equally actively with a positive reward and work it out. It does not go away easily, it is not like just forgetting. Work, work, work to take it to the other side. Unlike other memories which you just forget, fear memories you

often have to extinguish, which is probably one of the reasons why therapists for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder actually work at *extinguishing* these memories. They don't go away that easily.

Q: I have a personal question. Every time *you* have a stress, what happens in *your* mind? Do you look at how the brain is wired, or your thoughts and emotions override you like any one of us?

A: Yes, completely. You should have seen me in the morning when I was climbing up that rock, with my hands and feet because I was scared. I am a little scared of heights. So, I needed Kavya to give me moral support. 'No, no, no, you can do it, go ahead', and she told me not to look behind.

Q: So, the larger question is knowing about information. We usually feel 'Oh we know this, this is happening', but there is a difference between information and awareness. If you can shed some light on this?

A: I think knowing this perhaps most dramatically changed me: that the brain is plastic. One had a rather deterministic view where if X has happened, Y will happen. You know, you have this, then this is your future. But the brain is so ridiculously plastic, and there is so much capacity of change, that is perhaps the thing that I am most amazed by, even things that could be hard-wired can be turned back! I do worry about the early window though. That window is so critical, it worries me more than anything else. And I think that as a society at large, if you don't focus on that window, first 10-20 years, the first decade even more so...I worry about nutrition for example. What happens when you have nutritional deprivation? Sustained nutritional deprivation?

You are talking about smart cities, you are talking about getting new bullet trains from locations X to Y, but I worry about: why is education not the number one priority for anyone? Which is food, water, education, the basics, in the first decade. Everything else will fix itself afterwards if you get the first 15 years right, essentially the plinth is built. It is that plinth and if you build that right, then largely you have created a resilient individual. Because you are not able to get rid of stress, there is no way. So you only can programme resilience.

One of the things we want to move towards in the lab is how do you programme resilience? Because you also have resilient animals that take on stress and buffer through it. So, what programmes resilience? That is something we want to work on more. We spent so much time on working on what programmes vulnerability. But far less is our field looking at what programmes resilience.

Q: Talking about the epigenetics materials, two questions that I would like to understand. One is, we are dealing with first generation learners, so not gone to school. We work with tribal children. Because we struggle with helping them to learn. They don't understand text material. But they are good in other things, but our curriculum is not helping them.

A: The brain is best equipped to learn that which is valuable to the brain. So, essentially, if you are going to teach somebody something that they find fundamentally irrelevant for their lives, it is very unlikely it will really have an impact. There is no natural motivation that we all woke up saying 'I want to do higher education'. There is no such inherent natural motivation. All the motivators are rewards. So the rewards are social rewards, you do it because you want to make the other person happy, you like the person and that is one of the reasons why you want teachers you like. Because if you like, there is a massive desire to please that person. Then eventually, what you are doing also starts appealing to you. You get hooked onto it, but it starts with that. It has to be relevant, important and salient. It all has to mean something to the kid. I mean if the kid is interested in cricket, then convert mathematics into cricket if we can't teach them to do sums. If you want to do percentages, teach them about Sachin Tendulkar and get the batting percentages for everybody! That is a better way to do it, because there has to be a hook. In the absence of a hook, there is no stopping you from spending hours completely blanking out and unfortunately, large parts of educational experience are just about sitting there, blanking out!

Salient is the key thing for the brain. Anything you want to convey has to have a meaning to the individual in some way, shape or form - it could be social, it could be relevant physically, to the space.

Q: When you are talking about epigenetics, I am also thinking about the religious beliefs we hold such as the karma theory...things like that where you think that you inherit from past generations.

A: Karma theory. It is really interesting that biologists who sort of got raised on Darwin are now watching Lamarck being resurrected from the grave in a sense, right? Because you have this very Darwinian idea. But there might have been something true about what Lamarck was saying, which is that certain experiences, at least in short spans, can have an impact directly on your genome, modifying it. So, you know the data so far indicate that 2- 3 generations out, specific events can have certain degree of impact. It has been shown with substance abuse. Individuals who have had cocaine abuse, rodents, three generations out, if their grandparents had cocaine exposure, you have an imprint down three generations. So that is a little scary, I think we are at the tip of the iceberg in terms of understanding which genes can get imprinted and which can't. What does this mean at the whole genome level, we don't have an understanding. We have a very poor understanding still. Too initial, too premature to make a conclusive statement, but it is opening up a whole area of investigation.

Q: Are certain windows indefinitely open because certain pre-requisites are not met?

A: Extremely good question actually and critical periods are often dependent on certain things happening. So for example, if you are in the dark, if you are looking at visual critical periods and if you are really in the dark, the critical period stays open. So, in the absence of any sensory experience, just completely dark, the critical period window stretches. There are things that can stretch the critical period window. There are genetic ways and environmental ways and other manipulations that can reopen critical period windows. That is something all of us are very interested in; the idea that you can take an aged or an adult animal and reopen its critical period window. But we do it with a lot of genetic tools and there are all kinds of ways to reopen the window. I would not preclude that there are certain conditions in which you can open a critical period.

Q: Your talk gave a lot of negative indicators of how environment influences the brain. I don't know if it is a fair question, but because we are all educators and creating schools and environments, tell us what are the positive environments that enable learning?

A: So much as fear is an aversive learning tool, positive emotion is an equally strong hook for positive reinforcement of learning. And the big positive reinforcement of learning in the first decade is affection. Affectionate, positive voice, eye contact, touch are the big drivers. The other big driver is sleep and another big driver is nutrition. You can't teach a kid on low glucose. I tell my graduate students to eat well while we are doing class, because it keeps the conversation informal, we are talking, we are eating because glucose is a real driver. The other big driver is sleep. It is a hugely valuable driver of education. The biggest one that you have in your control is the positive emotion. It is as strong as fear, in that it can shift neutral things into strongly positive associations. For instance a logarithm is not something that is going to evoke great love. But, if it is paired with somebody whom you really, really like, then you know the log values will also move into something that evokes affection, because it starts getting paired with the environment or situation associated with positivity. Feeling good about yourself and feeling good about the people around you is a big driver of determining whether you like what you are listening to. If that happens, things which are neutral or even aversive can shift rapidly into the other side. As much as fear can do that, the other can also.

Small group discussions



A conference usually consists of presentations, panel discussions and perhaps a workshop. Despite having question and answer sessions, such a format does not allow participants to engage satisfactorily in a conversation and express their own questions, concerns and beliefs about the topic. Given the theme of our conference, and the fact that most of the participants were teachers on the ground, we felt it very important to provide them time and space to share their perspectives centred on the following questions:

How does the experience of fear become insidious and inhibit good learning?

How can the understanding of fear in schools cast a light upon our understanding of fear in much wider social spheres?

How might a school culture that aims to be free of fear enable the creation of a humane and progressive society?

Conferences rarely provide the opportunity for true dialogue. By dialogue we mean two or more individuals engaging in a conversation as equals; where it is not an expert ‘answering’ the questions of a novice. In our understanding of dialogue, individuals are genuinely interested in exploring together, without wanting to convince anybody about their point of view.

The attempt is to think together afresh and discover something that is true. We felt that the conference should definitely have spaces for both formal and informal dialogues of this kind. As these dialogues happen best when the group size is relatively small, we decided to divide the participants into ten groups, each consisting of not more than twelve individuals. To encourage a sense of continuity and an ease and comfort within each group, it was important that the composition of the small group remained the same through the four days. Therefore, the same groups met for about an hour and a half on all days of the conference.

There was no pre-decided topic for the small group discussions. The idea was that conversations flow from participants' questions. These questions may have been inspired by talks at the conference, by daily experiences in the life of the teacher, or by beliefs around fear, learning and education in general. What we hoped was that participants would also grasp the subtleties involved in understanding how fear has become endemic to our educational system. We had consciously chosen morning speakers with expertise in different areas to share their perspectives on the impact of fear on society, organising education, the psyche of the child and the architecture of the brain itself. We felt this would encourage participants to share their concerns and confusions, gain a more nuanced understanding and carry their learning to their daily practices of teaching and relating with their students.

To facilitate discussion among participants unfamiliar with each other, we assigned the role of 'moderator' to two people in each group. The role of the moderator was definitely not to hold forth or dominate the dialogue space! On the contrary, it was to encourage all participants to air their views (ensure they got an authentic listening) and make sure no one person dominated the air space. The moderator also had the task of holding the threads of the various conversations together, moving the conversation along, making sure there weren't too many digressions. While preparing for the conference, we had many discussions about the role of a moderator, and together arrived at certain clear pointers.

Many participants shared that they found these spaces meaningful. We had

arranged for note-takers in each group, and some brief glimpses from these are shared below. We hope these fragments of conversations give a sense of the broader concerns of the participants.

From Day 1

A group was discussing the question: What in the school environment intimidates children?

L: Children start learning from the time they are born. In school, they are restricted from doing what they have learned. No respect for what the child has already learnt. In the process of teaching them what we want them to learn, we disrespect what they already know.

S: During the transition from home to school, the child faces a feeling of being abandoned, lost etc. Early school experiences and not wanting to go to school could be connected with this. Also, short periods and getting into one period/activity after the other in class, each being done by a different adult etc. could be a confusing experience for children.

S: This may not be the case for rural areas as children are more used to larger families, more human interaction etc. and perhaps have more freedom too. Therefore, going to school may not evoke a sense of abandonment in rural areas.

In rural areas, it may be that the child moves from a space of freedom to one of restrictions when starting school.

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Another group: How do we create adult environments which are free of fear-generating tendencies or behaviour such as competition/comparison?

There is a distinction between professionalism and virtuosity. A professional gives a consistent performance, however, if teaching is based on virtuosity, today I was feeling great and so I did well, tomorrow I am not in a good mood, and my performance dips. Teacher education should be a

preparation for a professional so that there can be consistent good performance.

There has to be a pause in teachers' lives to be able to look at what is happening and reflect on it. Which are the reflective spaces or times for each of us?

In spaces where conscious learning and reflecting spaces do not exist, one of the difficulties we face is while you can reflect on your own, there is no sounding board to discuss such things.

While there is individual initiative, there have to be institutional structures and processes. Quakers, for instance, have a process where they have reflection. There are rules such as nobody can disagree or react to what others say, but they can reflect around what the other is saying.

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The fundamental nature of fear

R: Can we push deeper to find out why fear exists at all?

K: Is fear learnt? Or is it innate? By watching others, a child learns fear.

B: Inner expectations and fears.

S: Children observe others empathetically. Or from family. Fear is learned through this.

V: Social fears are the most prevalent. But do we negotiate with fear and go along? Can we live without social fear?

A: Can we look at the fundamental nature of fear? We can't reduce it. But if we look at it, it may go away.

S: There are things we can do to reduce fear. For example, if adults are less authoritative.

S: We can minimize fear in the environment if adult and child look at fear together. There should be that space.

R: Maybe the focus should be more on ourselves as adults. We have feelings of achievement, being a victim, having power or being powerless. The feeling of ambition. All of this is transmitted to the child.

S: Dialogue is important in understanding fear. The adults need to be vulnerable to the child, showing our human side.

K: The role of thought in fear. Is it that thinking generates fear? If we were involved in something, then there may not be any fear?

R: We need to look at words intervening in experiences and creating problems. Words have a life of their own.

V: Should we discuss fear in general or particular fears?

R: Begin with particulars? Students' fears must be allayed. For example, girls fear abuse. They must be helped.

From Day 2

Definitions of learning and fear

R: Learning means through enquiry one deepens the understanding of the concept... in any field and not restricted to say mainstream subjects like math/ science.

S: Learning is not restricted to the classroom. It extends to learning from others, activity based learning etc.

A: Learning is something that shifts me. It shifts me when I use it. Just plain skill set is not learning. Learning is something that helps me see things differently.

S: Learning is the culmination of my prior experience and enables me to use it in times of need.

T: Learning is something that happens every day. It is value addition. It is understanding oneself. The feeling of joy/freedom when you learn something new, or lose a set pattern which is negative.

G: Learning is just being mindful and examining processes. Paying attention.

G: One does not learn only from pleasant situations. One learns in life when thrown into an adverse situation/condition.

K: Learning and fear are actually happening all the time, you can't help but learn and you can't help but be afraid.

R: The mind desires something. When one loses it, fear creeps in. Fear is desire and the loss of it. It can be both tangible and intangible.

M: Fear is attachment and loss.

G: Ignorance is the cause of all fears. The more you familiarize with something like death, one is less afraid.

A: Fear is any situation that shakes me up. The reactions to different

situations breed fear.

S: Fear is something that does not give me an opportunity to make mistakes.

C: Fear is something that inhibits me from doing something I would want to do.

G: Fear is acquired. If one keeps that in mind, there is no scope for fear. If one takes the time and effort to understand oneself, fear reduces.

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The next discussion was about how to create an understanding and fear-free space for children.

S: How do teachers and students understand one another given numerous students and less time? Although they have 6 hours, it is not the same batch and same people.

K: Is time really essential for understanding?

T: On the same lines, sometimes we do not need much time to understand the situation.

J: You can have reflection exercises on a daily/weekly basis to help students understand.

C: You can have classroom time where one can discuss problems, issues faced by the students.

G: Understanding—knowing an individual inside out—can mean understanding the subtleties of students.

R: Trying to blend into their culture. Picking up cultural cues.

K: Sharing and patience are of significant value. We need to build such relationships.

K: Looking at things together helps understand one another better.

C: I can discuss the problems that are coming up in the classroom, not giving solutions, but helping students engage.

S: Yes, 'circle time' works. Also, to appreciate more and criticize in private.

J: Even during prayer session at our school, children themselves discuss points. One can pick a point which appeals the most to them. This helps children reflect upon themselves. Even in classrooms, there is a circle time where there is a conflict between two children, the children do not bottle it up, and get rid of or rather detach themselves from any feelings of animosity. The students apologize.

S: It is important to have not only formal spaces, but also informal spaces to interact. There was a teacher who learnt the local language, organized events and changed the role and image of a teacher. More than festivals, it was during times of trouble that she was there for the children.

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In another group: how to relate with children?

What are the boundaries? If we are too friendly, they might sit on our heads.

No clear boundaries, but we can ask if we can have a different kind of relationship. We are not their friends, but we can have a relationship.

Children don't listen to us and we don't listen to them.

Have we talked with the children about what we want them to do? Why don't they take things seriously beyond a point? Why does it all fade with time?

No time to talk with the children.

If you have to cover the syllabus, can you talk with the children?

I can talk with one child at a time.

Children also push limits.

Are there too many expectations on the child? Can we see if it is a feasible thing for us to fulfil these expectations?

Our action speaks more than words.

There is a lot of tension between order and freedom. When does our preoccupation become disruptive?

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Real and false fears

There are real dangers. It is the natural order of things. We need to be alert to danger, to threat. Intelligent response to danger is not the fear we are talking about.

But there is the fear of hurt and suffering.

We came to know after the survey that children can be alert to fear.

Is being alert tiring? Can we be alert to perceived threat?

It is dangerous to deny fear. We are not human if we don't have fear. When has fear been useful? Fear helps you protect yourself.

But if fear is dominant, we can't feel happiness.

We need perspective, to understand what is really threatened when we are afraid.

Fear is a false alarm. Are we educated to see these false alarms?

But millions of children's lives in the Middle East have been disrupted. We have collectively created such situations for these children, and we can talk to them about fear.

Can we live in the now, because it is tiring to live in fear. We have to be in the present.

Time and fear are deeply connected.



Can we help children to step back? What Jane said is significant. At 9, she could understand what it meant to live in the now.

What kind of emotional environment would you create if you are not thinking of the past or the future?

A Jewish man in the ghetto knew his life wasn't going to be very long. Yet, he did everything with attention as if he was going to live.

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Role of parents

Thanks to the RtE, the SMCs (School Management Committees) do take part in academics.

In this way, parents and the community are also entering the arena.

For example, parents are complaining, "They are simply playing. Is any learning/teaching happening?"

Parents asking these questions indicate that they are not considering peer learning, team work etc.

Parents are insecure. Anything different flusters them.

Parent orientation helps – when they are made aware of all aspects of school, they are better acquainted with the changing aspects of education.

But the issue is, when parents are daily wage labourers, they are not able to attend these visits.

Here's a suggestion – teachers can make home visits on Sundays once/twice in a term.

They can go with the children's folders of work. Let children talk about their work, or even the teachers can talk.

From Day 3

The question of hierarchical systems from the morning talk by Alok Mathur

How does one work to overcome fear in a heavily hierarchical system? Both the speakers (Alok and Shailesh) had responded that if we don't react and try to find ways of negotiating with the situation, we can perhaps create spaces for one's initiative and ideas and what one wants to do. While this can perhaps help solve our problems at an individual level, we discussed whether this could also eventually help change the status quo and hierarchy and lead to less hierarchical societies and systems. We explored this thought quite a bit. We discussed that there is scope for individual effort and that ultimately it's about human transactions and if we can begin with ourselves and work to improve those interactions, it can change the situation.

We also discussed that to change the status quo and bring about a larger change, there may be a need to go beyond the individual and look at collective and institutional solutions. We discussed that change in society might not happen by everyone building a consensus and agreeing to change

together, but by various unconnected changes over time leading to larger change in society. However, institutions, being consciously created entities, conscious and concerted efforts may be required to bring about change in institutional practices and processes.

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Control in the classroom

One member of the group said that in his class he allows children to do whatever they want and still, when there was a problem, they told about it to a new teacher and not to him. Were the students scared of approaching him? On closer examination, he realized that he was so involved in his work that he had not paid enough attention to them.

Another person said that as teachers, we always expect our students to love us, we almost make it like an obligation on them. We always want to be the child's favourite teacher. Is it our insecurity or is it for the child's good?

Another teacher said that he had once controlled 200 pupils by holding a stick in his hand. He said that he felt happy and powerful. The stick is a symbol of authority, putting himself above everyone.

To a question on how teachers appreciate and punish students without comparing them with others, one of them shared that they adopt a strategy wherein, if a student does not know the answer, he will pass on the question to the next student without making her feel awkward or embarrassed.

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Culture of relating in large schools

V: If we have classrooms and huge numbers, many sections, how does one keep in mind whether a child is present or absent, what the child is going through? Building a relationship seems a far cry – an aspiration. How can one break the cycle of huge numbers and practices that are so entrenched?

U: Getting maximum enrolment has become dominant culture. We have to decide our own goals for our work with children and not worry about

management pressures.

D: Our school has incorporated small things to help improve contact with the child. For example, teachers and children eat together so they know the children's favourite food.

A: I know a Principal of 8000 children, despite hierarchy, Head Master, Coordinator etc, when he walks around, children come to meet him, talk, joke. He has a personal equation.

N: Without conversations and optimism, we cannot make a change. Unless we feel a sense of hope, we cannot function...else we will become sick.

D: Given the large number of things a teacher has to do, contact with children has to be an extra effort to reach out. Often, this responsibility lies with the teacher.

N: Teacher support for each other is important in building these relationships.



Y: But, can we not wait for management to do this, and try to reach out to colleagues in small ways ourselves – read/eat/exchange books together?

...

Teacher-student relationship

A: Some children are not interested in engaging in relationship and intensely personal questions. Teachers are the ‘other’ and they are happy to keep the difference – them and us. There is not enough time in our school even if our group is 60 children and 20 teachers and very privileged with resources.

N: Adults seem to want to do so many things with children, time is never enough. Whether alternative school or government, time and pressure are felt. Perhaps we need to step back and allow more free spaces where children are left by themselves?

A: Can teachers rework their teaching, not so much to deliver information, but to have time to relate?

N: Can there be spaces where we can just be together, not do anything?

A: In our restructuring of curriculum, more spaces for this have been envisaged. Excursions, outings help children see in a new way and vice versa. We need more opportunities to be with children in the time table to enable this relaxed exploration together – not delivering content or trying to ‘do’ anything.

From Day 4

Learning environments

The child starts school very early: 2 1/2 – 3 years

Even though the child receives a friendly environment, he or she may be encountering fear so early in life. What must be happening to the child’s mind when faced with fear in the school environment?

As far as possible, we create an environment which is conducive. Given the plasticity of the brain, unlearning can be done. Are there other capacities of the brain which can be explored?

As educators, we must keep exploring ways by which the circuits can be rewired.

Free play for a child is vital, and leads to learning on her own.

Inclusion and non-hierarchy is as valuable for children as for adults.

Challenging our conditioning goes toward creating the environment for the child.

As an individual I may not know what was given/not in my past, as I grew. Is it that I am stuck with what I am, or do I take interest in learning about my fears? It depends on me, whether I get the environment or not. What is that 'learning', in an environment where challenges are there, and when we know things are not in our control? What can we do as individuals?

Knowing about the biological advancement should not stop us from thinking beyond and not get stuck with ideas.

Plasticity is very complex and also the role of the environment.

There will always be a debate on nature and nurture. One needs time to allow for the environment to have an impact.



On the third day, we held a three-hour workshop with the idea of helping teachers to recognise and work with their students' fears, to create dialogues/spaces and to feel more confident in doing this. In this section, we describe the essence of the workshop rather than reporting on the literal events that took place, as these would be difficult to capture on the printed page!

We made a few groups of not more than 20 individuals in each, two of whom were facilitating. Each group worked independently.

There were four sections in the workshop.

1. Brief introduction

Facilitator: "These last few days, we have heard many speakers and had many discussions on the topic of fear in school. In this workshop, we want to come up with approaches, strategies and ideas on how to practically work with our students' fears. Let us do this together, pooling all our resources.

"First, can we briefly review some of the main points about fear in school

cultures. *For this workshop we assume fear is an impediment to learning, not an aid.*"

- Fear is an emotion that allows us to avoid dangerous situations, just as it does in other animals.
- However, human beings are often in situations from which they cannot escape, and then fear become chronic, and it becomes stress, which expresses itself in the body in many ways.
 - Stress impedes learning by changing the biochemistry of parts of the brain.
 - Stress reduces the immune system's effectiveness.
Stress can cause a host of physical problems like asthma, IBS, acidity, migraine...
 - Fear is a learned response to situations. If it becomes a habit to respond to learning/challenging situations with fear, this habit will be lifelong. It will inhibit learning and relationship to challenge or newness for the rest of one's life. As adults, if we have unexamined fears, these will distort the way we live and relate in all situations.
- Children experience stress related with school, and the sources are many: exam performance (failure or just not doing well enough to fulfil expectations), punishment, social acceptance/rejection, bullying and aggression by other children, teachers' emotions such as anger or humiliation, not being able to understand/master what is taught.
- What can we do as teachers and educators to address these?
 - In rare cases we can change the system so that the fears are reduced—for example in our school we have done away with exams and tests till 10th. We can remove competition and replace it with cooperative work.
 - We can work on ourselves as teachers to be more supportive and affectionate.
 - In our classrooms, we can stop using fear to bring about learning, instead using affection, curiosity and excitement.

- Fears will still remain in our students, of all kinds, such as fear of the future, of death of loved ones, of loss, of domestic violence, and so on. Can we address these also in our time with our students? Is this also not a part of our work as teachers?

2. Spot the common errors in communication!

We chose 4 pairs of participants and gave them one of the four situations listed below. Each pair did a role-play of a student-teacher conversation, highlighting one common error in communication. The errors we suggested were: telling more than asking and listening, physically towering over a small child, pooh-poohing or judging the child for having this fear, getting angry that the child is afraid of me. The rest of the group tried to 'spot the errors'. This exercise was meant to be light and fun for all.

- A student has a fear of being rejected by his classmates.
- Your students are facing their 10th exams in a few months. One of them is very scared of failure.
- One student is frequently absent, and when you enquire, his mother tells you that he is afraid of your subject, or of you.
- A student never answers even simple questions put in class, seems to freeze in fear, and when asked she says she is afraid of giving a wrong answer.

3. Discussion

Participants first aired their thoughts on each question below, and later facilitators conveyed what we have learned about these from experience.

- a. What are the signs of fear in a child?

Somatic symptoms like stomach ache, headache. Falling sick often. Ulcers. Skin problems. Absences. Sleep and or appetite loss. Avoiding adults, stuttering, no eye contact. Prolonged reticence.

- b. Once you know a child has a fear, what steps will you take to address it?

Talk with the child to find out what it is. Determine whether you can help, or whether a professional is needed. Talk with the parents. Be reassuring about the feared consequences. Improve competence if that will help. Sit with a group of children and discuss fears.

- c. What might be reassuring and what might be intimidating behaviours during a conversation with a child?

Intimidating behaviours: If I am angry or irritated. Too many adults speaking to one child. If I pooh-pooh the fears of the child. If I become emotional and unreasonable. Reassuring behaviours: calmness, sharing that I also have fears but need not be crippled by them, making it clear I am approachable, not judging the child for having this fear, sitting together, not hovering over them. Sharing about common fears with a group of children.

- d. What are you expecting out of this conversation?

Fears may drop quickly, or may not. I have to be willing to work with this situation however long it may take, with patience. We should not think that just by talking once or twice everything will get resolved. But I do expect some relaxing, greater connection and confidence in the child.

- e. Will you be giving them the solutions, or will they find the solutions for themselves?

It's about listening, on both sides. We may not be able to solve the problem, but the fact that we are listening and showing care may be the beginning of a greater change. The child may not realise that fear and other emotions are also something we can work with, through observation and understanding. It's not inevitable that fears must exist. I am not encouraging a dependence on myself, but making them feel the confidence to address their emotional landscape.

- f. Is talking the only way to address a child's fear?

No. I can be more attentive to my attitudes and reactions with this child. I can be watchful to see what the child is feeling and expressing through the day. If it is a fear of a physical situation or object, I can gradually extinguish the fear through exposure with the security of my presence.

- g. Can a teacher involve other people in resolving a child's fear?

As we have said, their friends who have or had similar fears can be a reassurance. Older students or siblings can be of help. Parents can help. If the fear is more serious, a professional counsellor may be of help.

- h. I might have been using humiliation or fear in my interactions with students for some years. Not only that, it was used by my teachers when I was in school. How will I get out of this habit?

What are my deep beliefs, assumptions and insecurities? Do I think that certain kinds of children "can't learn", and is there a rational basis to this? Do I want to know how my students perceive me; can I put in processes such as anonymous feedback about how they experience me? Can my colleagues observe and give me suggestions, and can I talk with my colleague if I know students are afraid of him/her? Often, learning more effective classroom management techniques can remove the need to use fear and humiliation. For example, rearranging the classroom may help. Having conversations and relating with children outside the classroom may help.

4. Role play activities

We made groups of three, and each chose one of the situations below.

- a. One student is frequently absent, and when you enquire, his mother tells you that he is afraid of your subject, or of you.
- b. A student never answers even simple questions put in class, seems to freeze in fear, and when asked she says she is afraid of giving a wrong answer.
- c. One student is being regularly bullied by another.
- d. A student has a fear of being rejected by his classmates.
- e. Your students are facing their 10th exams in a few months. Some of them are very scared of failure.
- f. A student tells you that he is afraid of not being able to understand what is taught in school.



- g. A boy is afraid that he will not get a job, or not be able to earn enough money.
- h. A girl is afraid of getting married.
- i. A student is afraid because her parents are in constant conflict at home.
- j. One student witnessed a traumatic event in her neighbourhood. She continues to have dreams and thoughts about it.

One played student, one played teacher, and one played the observer who points out or draws out behaviours for the other two. These roles rotated so each played every role once. The triads did this activity without an audience. Then we all gathered to share responses to these questions:

Reflections: what are two things I am going to do differently from now on? What are two things that have changed in my understanding of children's fears? What two changes will I make in my interactions with my students on a day-to-day basis? What has been most enlightening for me in this experience just now?



Our learning from this experience was tremendous. The breadth of varying backgrounds, both in speakers and participants, gave us a rich view of the relevance of the questions that prompted the conference. From *adivasi* schools, to mainstream and alternative private schools, to educational spaces for migrant labourers' children, to government schools: all had the sense of cooperating to understand a problem larger than ourselves, impacting us all profoundly. Four days were spent in a spirit of friendship, which was crucial to opening up our own assumptions, feeling safe in exploration, and reaching the fundamentals of our work. We re-learned the power of non-divisive speaking and listening, with all our differences in language and identity. 'Minor' players had the confidence to speak to those 'in power,' who in turn had the humility to listen and respond with respect and patience.

We are grateful for the opportunity to nourish such learning in others and ourselves.

This book contains the proceedings of an unusual conference, Worlds of Fear: School Cultures, held at the Centre For Learning campus outside Bangalore in December, 2015. The participants were fortunate to hear several passionate speakers from all over India, ranging from researchers and psychologists to educators and teachers, on the theme of fear. The content of their talks (on the impact of fear on society, on organising education, on the psyche of the child and the architecture of the brain itself) and the ensuing discussions are reproduced here to share with a wider audience.

Participants represented a wide range of schools: government, private, urban, rural, alternative and tribal. A unique feature of the conference was the space given for small groups to meet formally and informally in dialogue; these dialogues are also described here.

All the material gathered in this book makes it clear how fear is a systemic and yet neglected aspect of children's lives in school. If we care about the well-being of our children, we need to understand how fear operates in them and in the adults who populate learning spaces throughout India.