

# Centre For Learning



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**J. Krishnamurti:** This is really a vast question, isn't it, not to be answered in a couple of minutes. But perhaps we can put it briefly, and it may be gone into further afterwards.

The problem is not what kind of education the child should have but rather that the educator needs education, the parent needs education... Do we not need a totally different kind of education? – not merely a cultivation of memory, which gives the child a technique, which will help him to get a job, a livelihood, but an education that will make him truly intelligent. Intelligence is the comprehension of the whole process, the total process of life, not knowledge of one fragment of life.

So the problem is really: can we, the grown-up people, help the child to grow in freedom, in complete freedom? This does not mean allowing him to do what he likes, but can we help the child to understand what it is to be free because we understand ourselves what it is to be free?

Our education now is merely a process of conformity, helping the child to conform to a particular pattern of society in which he will get a job, be outwardly respectable, go to church, conform, and struggle until he dies. We do not help him to be free inwardly so that as he grows older, he is able to face all the complexities of life – which means helping him to have the capacity to think, not teaching him what to think. For this, the educator himself must be capable of freeing his own mind from all authority, from all fear, from all nationality, from the various forms of belief and tradition, so that the child understands with your help, with your intelligence – what it is to be free, what it is to question, to enquire and to discover.

But, you see, we do not want such a society; we do not want a different world. We want the repetition of the

### **What kind of education should my child have in order to face this chaotic world?**

old world, only modified, made a little better, a little more polished. We want the child to conform totally, not to think at all, not to be aware, not to be inwardly clear – because if he is so inwardly clear, there is the danger to all established values. So what is really involved in this question is how to bring education to the educator.

How can you and I – because we, the parents, the society, are the educators – how can you and I help bring about clarity in ourselves so that the child may also be able to think freely, in the sense of having a still mind, a quiet mind, through which new things can be perceived and come into being?

This is really a very fundamental question. Why is it that we are being educated at all? Just for a job? Just to accept Catholicism or Protestantism, or communism or Hinduism? Just to conform to a certain tradition, to fit into a certain job? Or is education something entirely different – not the cultivation of memory, but the process of understanding. Understanding does not come through analysis; understanding comes only when the mind is very quiet, unburdened, no longer seeking success and therefore being thwarted, afraid of failure. Only when the mind is still, only then is there a possibility of understanding, and having intelligence. Such education is the right kind of education, from which obviously other things follow.

But very few of us are interested in all that. If you have a child, you want him to have a job; that is all you are concerned with – what is going to happen to his future. Should the child inherit all the things that you have – the property, the values, the beliefs, the traditions – or must he grow in freedom, so as to discover for himself what is true? That can only happen if you yourself are not inheriting, if you yourself are free to enquire, to find out what is true.





## Intent of CFL

### Learning at CFL

Centre For Learning is a community of students, teachers and parents interested in inquiring about ourselves and our relationship with the world. From its small beginnings in 1990, CFL has meandered through several locations and campuses. Today we are a semi-residential school on a twenty-five acre campus located outside Bangalore City, home to about seventy children, twenty adults and many birds, trees and animals.

CFL began as a response to dissatisfaction with career, lifestyle, relationships and the social contexts in which these happen. We feel a discontent with existing individual and social responses to these challenges. In a world that is obviously in turmoil at all levels—from the personal to the global—it is vital for us as concerned human beings to explore creative responses to the crises surrounding us.

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Equally importantly, an inward inquiry that seeks to understand ourselves and the nature of personal and social well-being is essential. The starting point for us is the observation that society is a reflection of the quality of the individual experience in daily living. Each of us is driven by deep forces of conditioning, often spanning many generations, along with a strong need to seek pleasure and avoid pain. More importantly, each individual seems to have a need for self-preservation and self-protection in many realms, from the physical to the psychological. This instinct for self-preservation often leads to conflict within oneself and in society. When billions of humans display these patterns, it is no wonder that there are economic, environmental and personal crises all across the globe.

Philosophers like the late Jiddu Krishnamurti suggest that human beings do not inevitably have to lead life through this self-centred perspective. There could be moments of learning that allow one to respond to life free of egotism and conflict. The heart of CFL's educational endeavour is an exploration of this learning.





*Our challenge has been to create an environment that nurtures learning, not just in its academic sense, but as a living, vital process of inquiry.*

## Nurturing learning

For most children, education has been reduced to the mechanical study of subjects and training to pass examinations as a route to a career. Our challenge has been to create an environment that nurtures learning, not just in its academic sense, but as a living, vital process of inquiry. We learn about ourselves and our relationships, in addition to the skills and knowledge necessary to function in the world. CFL is what it is because we believe that learning must nurture a capacity for questioning and reflection. It is most effective when it is multidimensional: intellectual, emotional and social. We have to be alive to the child's needs, capabilities and interests. Learning is a creative partnership, as much for the teacher as for the student.

Our attempt has been to create a space where children can learn free of the pressures of achievement and success and the burden of constant comparison and judgement. Thus, reward and punishment are not used as motivational factors. Nor is there a place for authority and dogma. We see these as detrimental to learning. The relationship between the teacher and student is grounded in a trust that allows for questioning each others' patterns and motives. Since our inception, we have seen that children can and do learn with a sense of leisure, joy and discipline that is brought about by reflection and awareness rather than fear and punishment.

Alternative schools, while acknowledging all of the above, sometimes define the purpose of education as individual fulfilment, for each child to express her unique individuality. The goal of education then becomes to ensure that the individual secures his or her own future happiness. The school environment is infinitely nicer for both children and adults, there is a lot more affection and fun. At CFL however, we are exploring whether it is possible to live without self-interest, at a very fundamental level, so that there is a shift in our way of functioning, both individually and collectively. Therefore, we are skeptical of educational models that place the fulfillment of individual emotional patterns at their centre.

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## Adults at CFL

People are central to the survival of a place like CFL. Even when we began, our strength was not in infrastructure or financial backing but in the commitment of a group of people. This continues to be the case today.

Over the years, there has been a steady flow of adults interested in joining CFL. Working here demands that one be interested in an inquiry that is questioning one's life, emotions and patterns. The teacher has to enjoy working with children and should have a variety of skills. CFL can be sustained only if people are willing to extend themselves, looking at the needs of the community as a whole. Our challenge over the years, as always, will be in keeping the fundamental questions fresh in a group whose composition is bound to change over time.

We have often been asked whether our model of education is replicable. In theory, there is no reason why not. It requires the momentum of a small group of people who see the importance of a different kind of education in today's global context, and are willing to come together in a cooperative way.



*Working here demands that one be interested in an inquiry that is questioning one's life, emotions and patterns.*







*It is important to us that the parents are “discontented” with the way we are meeting life and are willing, in a critical way, to set off on a new journey of exploration.*

## Parents’ role and the admissions process

For a school like CFL, a healthy and open relationship between the teachers and parents is crucial; the child benefits most when this relationship is strong. So it has always been important to us to communicate clearly to prospective parents what our intentions are, and what CFL is all about. People variously believe that we are a non-formal school with plenty of “extracurricular” activities; or a school where children will be given freedom; or a school where children will not be punished and given too much homework; or a school where a certain philosophy is “inculcated” and values “taught”; or a school with a great teacher-student ratio!

Perhaps, like all groups, we just don’t like to be typecast, but we do believe that our fundamental concern is something deeper: to discover what it means to live intelligently and sensitively, by being awake to the patterns of conditioning in behaviour. This concern stems from our own daily interactions, rather than being an abstract philosophical idea.

When prospective parents visit, the teachers describe the intent and functioning of CFL at length, and the parents raise their questions and concerns in an open and frank atmosphere. What we look for is, initially, an openness and willingness to work with us in the care of their children. It is important to us that the parents are “discontented” with the way life is moving and are willing, in a critical way, to set off on a new journey of exploration. The teachers at CFL have come together with a deep interest in finding out if there is a different way of approaching our psychological lives. With this background, we would like to educate the young to see if a different kind of society can be created. Parents who wish to join us must be excited by this twin intention and must begin by seeing that education at CFL is much more than the specific training and experiences that their child may receive. Without this direct engagement with our philosophy, the education the child may receive will be limited.

Children are not given any entrance tests or screened in any way; we admit parents and invite children to be a part of this process. The capacity to pay is never a criterion for admission; the only criterion is an interest in and engagement with the philosophical basis of the school.





CFL's parents represent a mixed bag of professions and interests: academics, individuals working in NGOs, artists, lawyers, doctors, software engineers, government employees and self-employed individuals. This diverse parent body has come together to create, along with us, an extended vibrant community. Once a student joins CFL, the parents play a large role, not only in the education of their own child, but also in a wider dialogue on questions of educational and personal significance. We depend on the cooperation and the goodwill of an extended community, including the parents, to keep our work alive.

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## Structure of the School

*As a group of adults, we function with an unusual organisational structure. We are a teacher-run school.*

### Organisation

Centre For Learning is a charitable society registered under applicable laws in India.

As a group of adults, we function with an unusual organisational structure. We are a teacher-run school. Support staff has been kept to the minimum. Teachers have a variety of responsibilities, ranging from the academic to the administrative to the daily care of children. We work cooperatively and without administrative hierarchy. Major decisions related to the work of the group are arrived at through discussion and dialogue. Working closely together in such an environment is both challenging and rewarding. All full-time teachers receive the same basic salary; when teachers complete five years, they receive an additional pension component.

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### Economics of a small school

A central concern of the school is to be affordable to all parents seriously exploring alternative education. We have consciously created a financial structure that is responsive to parents' financial capacity.

Each year, we calculate the "annual cost per child" by dividing the total running expenses of the school by the number of students enrolled. The running expenses include the salaries of the teachers, and academic and administrative expenses. They do not include infrastructure costs or other capital expenditure. They also do not include annual food, transport and excursion expenses incurred by students. Towards this annual cost, parents contribute what they can; the rest is covered by a scholarship offered by the school. We do not place a cap on either the number of individual scholarships or the extent of each scholarship. Of course, parents pay food, transport and excursion costs at actuals.

CFL's financial philosophy, along with the fact that we are a small school, requires us to be extremely disciplined regarding our expenditure and also demands an active fund-raising programme on our part. Thanks to the support of a global community of well-wishers, we have a campus with suitable infrastructure. We have also built up a corpus (endowment fund) that contributes to scholarship requirements and any capital expenditure we may incur.



## Life on a Residential Campus

### Our habitat

Varadenahalli is a small village forty kilometers to the west of Bangalore, not very far from Magadi, the nearest town. Our campus is located on a twenty five-acre piece of land near the village. Covered by grassland and deciduous forest scrub, the land slopes down sharply to the north and the high rock at the southern end offers a dramatic view of the whole landscape around. From the rocks on the northern fringe of the CFL campus, Savandurga, the “elephant hill” dominates the view. We have grown fond of this enormous hill that towers over our surroundings. All of us have been to the top, and have stories to tell about the breathtaking view and the tearing winds.

This part of Karnataka receives about 80 cm of rain in a year. The landscape around the campus is dry for most of the year, and the farmers grow a single rain-fed crop of grain (ragi is the staple) and pulses. Thippagondanahalli is a large reservoir visible from the campus that supplies water to the city. There are forests around Savandurga and many species of wildlife.

The land at Varadenahalli has been shaped both by water and its lack. The condition of the soil in the area is typical of that in many parts of Karnataka—semi-arid land, where the soil has been degraded over years due to lack of organic matter and poor management techniques. Therefore, a considerable portion of our campus land has been put aside as a “sanctuary”, for flora and fauna indigenous to this area. The sanctuary provides precious habitats for a wide variety of creatures, many of which are quite rare or unique to these surroundings.



Since we moved to this beautiful location, we have learnt a great deal about how a campus can become a great educational resource in terms of looking after the land and of observing and understanding the habitat we live in. Equally important is the interaction we have had with our neighbours in understanding the challenges of rural life.





## Our daily life

We are a semi-residential campus. For younger students, the day begins early, by 7am, with walks, nature observation or classes. For the senior students, we have respected the fact that the growing adolescent needs plenty of sleep, and we have changed our schedules so that their day begins at 8am. During community work (after breakfast), the buildings are cleaned, garbage is taken out, the plants watered, and vegetables are chopped for lunch. Everyone is part of this process.

The assembly that follows is a time for singing, presentations and listening. The entire community comes together in these activities and in sitting quietly for a few minutes. Long sessions of quiet (lasting up to an hour) are an important part of the day, either in the morning or the evening. After assembly, children are engaged in learning a variety of subjects ranging from physics to Kannada to pottery. Evenings are a time for games, exercise and walks. The kitchen hums with activity throughout the day, with teachers, support staff and parent volunteers working to get meals ready. Dinner is followed by a quiet period of study, and then we retire to bed.

Even though we have busy schedules, we have attempted to create leisurely spaces for quiet, to slow down and observe ourselves and our surroundings.





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# Curriculum

Our curriculum through the years is a dynamic response to what we perceive as movements in children and in the world at large. Education in society today largely ignores psychological issues such as insecurity, apathy, and self-absorption—forces that we feel are at the root of political, environmental and social crises all around us. Understanding these is central to bringing up children, to their emotional wellbeing, and by extension, to the healing of society as a whole.

Learning, therefore, has to be about human nature and relationship as well as the traditional subject areas. Academic learning and certification alone will not suffice. If we want every child to learn, regardless of background and ability, we have to create the right space for learning. This demands a relationship between teachers and students based on affection, not fear. In such a space there can be close listening and attention. We do not promote hostility among students by comparing them, nor do we measure a child's worth using arbitrary criteria. By being in touch with the emotional life of the child, the teacher promotes security and wellbeing, and creates the conditions for lifelong learning.

Dialogue is an integral part of our curriculum at all ages, and it is described in detail in a separate section below. Here we briefly outline our junior, middle and senior school curricula.

The 8 to 12 year-olds are exposed to a wealth of experiences, a great many of them linked with the natural world. They also learn the fundamentals of language (Hindi, Kannada and English) as well as of mathematics. Possible areas of engagement in these years are cooking, cleaning, drama, music, dance, pottery, art, craft, land work, nature walks and observation, astronomy, annual excursions, caring for things and for each other. Through all these activities, we learn the need for keen observation and total involvement.

When they are a little older, students begin to explore subjects at greater depth. They engage with projects that open them up to worlds beyond their own familiar lives. These projects are broadly around themes in the social studies and science. Children are trained in academic and critical thinking skills, alongside the nurturing of their artistic inclinations and physical abilities. All along, we are concerned with a sense of responsibility for the place and the people, expressed in small acts of taking care of common property and looking out for each other.



When the students are around 13 years old, they are introduced to separate subject areas. Their writing and articulation skills are sharpened. The teachers keep two factors in mind: that each child reaches his or her levels of excellence, and that a basic grounding in all subjects is given to each child regardless of talent or aptitude.

Our senior school programme both challenges and nurtures the 15-18 year olds. It is spread over three years to enable us to actualise our intent. It is a rigorous programme and we want students to come to it with an understanding of its demands. We look to these emerging adults to support the teachers in the running of the school, in terms of owning the ethos of CFL and mentoring their juniors in various ways. They are encouraged to be partners in their own learning—rather than passive consumers—and can participate in creating their own programme. Students also prepare for school-leaving certification in these years.

All senior school students participate in a General Studies course, which is concerned with social and environmental awareness. In the environmental component, we want students to have an understanding of the unique challenges facing our planet today along with an intimate relationship with their local habitat. In the social awareness module, we want our students to have empathy and an appreciation of how people outside their milieu live. A key ingredient for both modules is interaction with people who have committed their lives to either social or environmental issues.



## Academic programme

We would like our students to experience the satisfaction and confidence that comes from understanding academics. We seek to emphasise the thinking processes that underlie the various disciplines: thinking like a historian or a mathematician, for example. With this understanding, we believe, comes an appreciation of the beauty of all these varied and interconnected aspects of human thought and insight. For this to happen, students have to gain a skill and knowledge base in the core areas of language, mathematics, social studies and science. Our curriculum includes rigorous engagement with independent thought and work, as well as routine drill and practice. We equip students to learn from a variety of sources: texts, lectures, discussions, experiments and observations.

With all of this in mind, we have drawn up core curricula for the ages 8 to 14 years. The curricula give the teachers a base and guideline on which to develop classes creatively. Teachers have the flexibility and autonomy to teach in their own style, while keeping learning outcomes firmly in mind.

In the 10th and 12th standards, we present the students for recognised school-leaving certificate examinations. We have selected a certification that best reflects our own approach to the curriculum: the Cambridge Assessment International Education IGCSE certificate at the secondary school level and the CAIE GCE 'A' level at the senior secondary level.



In conventional education, individual ambition and competition are often the tools that motivate young people. Our approach to academic learning is not designed along these lines; rather, we appeal to an innate sense of curiosity to know, understand and enjoy that we believe every child has. We have found that competence and confidence are attainable without the insecurity and divisiveness that personal ambition invites.

After their schooling at CFL, we feel our students are responsible learners. They are not intimidated by what they do not know, and are able to look at life and livelihood in terms of opportunities for learning.

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## Craft and art

Children have a strong urge to work with their hands. At CFL, it is our intention to nurture this quality of the child. Through the years, the students are exposed to different materials and are encouraged to work with them: fabric, wood, thread, clay, paper, bamboo, coconut shell and beads. This has helped them to learn the nature, beauty and limitations of each of these. Our curriculum emphasises the importance of the process involved rather than arriving at the end result.

Every class begins with a meeting to discuss and organise the time and tasks involved. The approach to an idea, or a design and the visualisation of detail is given importance before getting into skills and techniques. Extension projects are given when the students are around twelve years old. Students are made aware of the care and maintenance of the tools and of the necessity of, say, cleaning the work area after work is completed. As the children begin to make craft items, which have an ornamental or utilitarian value, they learn to also bring in aesthetics and quality in their work. Teamwork in creating an art piece is an important aspect apart from individual engagement, and brings in qualities such as co-operating, brainstorming together, helping one another and assessing each others' quality of work.

We have a wood shed where formal classes happen regularly and where students work out of individual interest too. Depending on the age group, children come in once or twice a week to learn some basic skills in woodcarving or carpentry. These skills are the use of the saw and chisels, learning to measure and mark, learning joinery work and the elements of design and carving. Much of the raw material for students' work comes from leftover wood from construction use that has been collected over time.

Clay is a medium which lends itself to use by the youngest of our children. They soon become accustomed to the rhythm of the pottery shed, learning basic hand techniques as well as how to use certain tools and clean up the space on completion. We try to maintain their contact with clay through their time at CFL whether it be hand techniques or wheel work.

Art work allows the child to play with line, form and colour. It provides immediate gratification and is immediately meaningful to a child. It nurtures the exploratory and creative experience through handling material. It is important that the adult is more of an observer and intervenes only when absolutely necessary.

We begin with the child learning to observe lines, forms, shapes and colour in the environment. Looking and drawing is a very important part of the curriculum. For the youngest children, free drawing is something that is encouraged. Flat, bold and direct representations are common, slowly moving on to more sophisticated details. The 11 to 14 year-olds learn the art room "etiquette"; the maintenance of the art room and art materials needs constant discussions. They are ready to improve their technical skills and have more control over the media. There is exposure to other artists' works in the form of readings from the library and looking at works of artists who happen to visit the school.

Coming to the senior school allows students to choose an activity they will work on for the term. Now there is a seriousness to work at something in a sustained manner. More serious reading is suggested regarding art and emphasis is given to preparatory work.



## Open library

CFL has an open library both in concept and reality. There is free and open access to all material and resources, at all times of day and night, throughout the year. The challenge for the CFL librarian is not one of policing and monitoring, but to see and hold the library and its users as a vibrant functioning whole. We can only do this when the community of users feels a sense of ownership and accountability. Helping the library in various ways is inherent to the culture of the place: by maintaining books, dusting and cleaning, organising activities and locking up.

The main library is located in a beautiful building whose ambience welcomes and invites all users and visitors. The collection reflects the commitment to quality and excellence: wonderful books can be found on all the shelves. Staff and students are actively involved in the selection process. The facility of borrowing has

been extended to former students, parents and guests. The library collection has been digitised, allowing for an easy borrowing and returning system, very much in keeping with the philosophy of an open library.

Every student group has a weekly library period for browsing, borrowing, returning and for various activities to enhance reading and awareness of the library. Students also do projects to facilitate use of the library by creating bibliographies, making indexes and labels for shelves and making posters and bookmarks.

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## Dialogue through the ages

(This piece was written for an issue of our annual newsletter).

*What do you think dialogue is all about?*

“We think of all the bad things we have done and we share it!” comes a quick reply from a junior school child. “It is about confessing,” offers another generously, much to the amusement of the adults who may have a fleeting comical vision of themselves sitting at the receiving end in a confessional box! These children are not entirely incorrect; sometimes the discussions are about actual “wrongdoings.” However, we don’t stop at the discussion of the incident and those involved. Be it pre-teens, teenagers or young adults, the incidents may vary, but the themes that emerge are remarkably the same. Of course, these themes are relevant for us adults as well.

The question *Why do we talk behind other peoples’ backs?*, raised by a middle schooler, is as relevant for a nine year old as it is for a nineteen, thirty-nine or a ninety year old. For the nine-year old, it may be grounded in a particular incident, with particular people. Finger pointing could be the starting point of the discussion. “He did!”, “She did!” and so on. Often, in the course of discussion, this moves to a reflection, at least for that moment, to “I did too” or “I also do.” For some children, that moment doesn’t last very long, but for others, even at this age, it becomes a part of their

way of processing the world. For instance, in a discussion about a peer who often got easily upset, an eight-year old asked: *How can you say you have made up your mind not to get upset when it is the same mind that is making you upset?* This offers more food for thought.

As we move on to 12-13 year-olds, we notice that the students are able to start turning the questions around to themselves on their own in remarkable ways. There is the possibility to move away from a particular incident to a more general inquiry with questions such as: *How does it make me feel when I gossip and why? Why do I feel anger/jealousy/insecurity/a sense of division and what does it do to me? Why am I restless or bored? Why do certain things make me feel happy and what does this do to me?* and so on. Students sometimes share candidly from their own lives, both personal and at school. At times, when questions like *Why do we have to keep asking why?* or *Do we have to talk about fear again?* arise, the half-joking response from the adult may be, “Well, if you have solved the issue of fear and aren’t scared of anything anymore, we needn’t talk about it!” The children roll their eyes in mock irritation and we move on – either to continue talking about fear, or to their (momentary) relief, bring in a new theme of anyone’s choice.



*We ask these questions because they seem important, shake us out of our comfort zone and hopefully will inform our approach to life.*

The senior school students may engage in a discussion on the role of their consciousness in the crises of the world, how their relationships operate from images (positive or negative) they have of each other, whether they can be sceptical of the absolute “truth” of their feelings or emotions, about the nature and existence of the self, and so on. Again, a frank sharing by both adults and students, an ability to look inward and an interest to carry the discussion forward, are essential. Some students may argue, *You have been doing this for twenty years and haven’t come to any answers. Most others who are not interested in all this seem to be living just fine. So why must we ask all this of ourselves?!* It is not always easy to respond to this. Firstly, the assumption that the ‘others’ they refer to are ‘fine’ is not apparent at all. Further, asking such questions of oneself and each other does not guarantee arriving at a state of happiness. We ask these questions because they seem important, shake us out of our comfort zone and hopefully will inform our approach to life. Submitting to a guru or religion doesn’t seem to work. We are left with the same questions, or perhaps more questions arise: what is the role of religion in creating feelings of division in society?

After much discussion, sharing and some moments of insight, we often catch the children and ourselves indulging in behaviours and patterns which we may have just put under the scanner! And back to the drawing board we go – to err is human after all! But there seems to be some learning in the process: the eight year old boy who at the beginning of the year had thought dialogue was all about sharing the “bad things” we do, now says, “It is about what is on our mind.” Well, one hopes this is not limited to the “bad things” we do!







## Learning from the land

We would like our children to develop a deep intimacy with their immediate living surroundings. We hope that this will help them develop an affectionate relationship with all living creatures. It is only such a relationship which will help us understand our place in the web of life. There is also an urgency about the need for children to connect to worlds not created by thought. Most urban children seem to be living in a virtual reality and today educators are talking about a 'Nature Deficit Syndrome' that affects our well-being adversely. In order to facilitate such an intimacy, students spend a lot of time observing nature, going for long walks, keeping a nature journal and collecting data about the biodiversity on campus. The idea is to have a very keen and accurate understanding of the habitat we live in. The work that we have done so far has yielded some very exciting and encouraging results.

While learning about the various habitats on campus, children have made some very thrilling discoveries, including rare species of plants, butterflies and lizards. We are learning more and more about how even a small strip of land such as ours is home to an incredible diversity of wilderness. This firsthand experience appeals to children tremendously. Don't be surprised if on a visit to our campus you see a whole herd of children dropping whatever they are doing to go look at a beautiful bird or an awesome insect or a riveting snake!

The second strand to this curriculum involves taking care of and connecting with the land that houses our campus. We see this as part of our responsibility as stewards of the earth. Students have undertaken projects

which involve mapping the campus, understanding issues of water flow and erosion, growing fruits and vegetables, planting trees and caring for them, creating ornamental gardens, maintaining the fence and removing weeds and invasive species. In the process we have encountered challenges that are faced by many environmentalists – the impact of invasive species such as Lantana and Eupatorium and how to manage them. These in turn have made us more aware of many issues that confront human beings – the relationship between people and the land, the question of sustainability, the complexity and interconnectedness of many environmental issues, and finally, our need to consume and its impact on the environment.

Children have been involved with the maintenance and management of the campus land in many ways, to different degrees, since the school moved to its residential campus. Their involvement has been mostly in the areas of invasive plant management and agriculture. Over the recent years, there has been an increasing interest amongst students in the area of landscaping and construction activities. They help with carrying out simple projects that are built according to the needs of the school. These activities are in the areas of water conservation, soil erosion control, building a wood storage shed, assisting in dry stone walling, creating pathways and seating areas and maintaining garden spaces.





## Excursions

Every year, the students go on exciting trips to various parts of India in small groups. We see these excursions as a very important part of our curriculum. The younger ones visit nearby places for a few days, but older students travel quite far for two to three weeks. The trips allow for three dimensions—to challenge ourselves physically (trekking, climbing, swimming), to immerse ourselves in the cultural and historical sites that India has such a wealth of, and to expose ourselves to lives and lifestyles outside our own social milieu. An inevitable aspect of the trips is the demand placed on the children to adjust to life away from home, without the usual comforts, and we find consistently that children enjoy the simplest of pleasures on these trips. Entertainment takes on a new meaning. In the middle to senior school groups, students take on some of the responsibilities to make sure the trip proceeds smoothly. As the students grow older, the trips tend to complement our general studies programme, so they get to see first-hand many of the complex social and environmental issues around us.



Over the years we have visited almost every state in India. The children have swum in lakes, rivers and the sea, climbed forested ghats and snow-peaked mountains, wandered through ancient temples and palaces, slept in village and tribal homes, under the stars, on the beach, in the forest, travelled by bus, boat and train, and have come to feel at home in every corner of this vast country.

*The trips allow for three dimensions—to challenge ourselves physically (trekking, climbing, swimming), to immerse ourselves in the cultural and historical sites that India has such a wealth of, and to expose ourselves to lives and lifestyles outside our own social milieu.*





*At CFL, games and sports are totally participative and celebratory.*



## Mela

Every two years, the entire school is involved in the close study of a particular theme in a multitude of contexts. This whole colourful experience is presented as a mela. The idea is to allow each student to explore a subject in some depth, including an element of research and detailed study. This extended engagement gives a feel of the richness of the topic at hand. Over the years, we have explored a variety of topics, ranging from the tangible (toys, craft) to more the more intangible (childhood, mathematics). Depending on the theme, we have found different ways to communicate our understanding to each other and to a wider audience, using theatre, art, posters and models. A key feature of our mela presentations has been an interactive approach, in which the audience participates in the learning process.

For example, we planned a unique mela in which students of all ages from across India, from a multitude of backgrounds, interacted with us. The interaction was twofold: we visited them at their schools for several days, learning about their daily life, and in turn, CFL students organised a children's conference. This was a mix of workshops, walks and hikes, cooking, presentations and conversations both formal and informal.

## Physical activity

At CFL, games and sports are totally participative and celebratory. By that we mean that all students play games, irrespective of their prowess at it. The attempt is to convey the sheer joy of physical movement, energy, exuberance and special skills inherent in each game. We lay a great deal of emphasis on physical fitness and strength. In a week, four to six hours are given over to a fitness programme, games, cycling, and long walks.

The students enjoy this space and guard it zealously. Over the years, students and teachers have played frisbee, cricket, volleyball, basketball, football, handball and table-tennis. We have always played these games with help from teachers or former students who were skilled in the game. Occasionally, we have had trained coaches come in to impart a special fitness programme. An ongoing feature of our games programme is the willingness and enthusiasm with which more experienced students take on skill-building for the newer ones.



## Engaging with a wider world

### Thinking with others

Our primary mode of reaching out is in sharing our philosophy with a wide range of interested educators and organisations. These include students of education, young people seeking alternatives, groups wanting to start schools, administrators and teachers in existing schools and teacher educators. We do not believe that the CFL model needs to be “replicated” or “scaled up” in its details; rather, the spirit of our sharing is to explore some fundamental questions in education and daily living. These kinds of interactions have led to various programmes and initiatives across the country. On another level, we also share our pedagogical insights through writing articles, giving presentations and conducting workshops and conferences.

*It is a conscious part of our education to sensitize students to the realities of the world around them, while at the same time helping them to engage constructively, albeit in small ways, in social and environmental work.*



### Connecting worlds

Ever since we moved to a rural campus, we have sought to build relationships with the children and adults of the neighbouring villages in various ways. Students from government schools visit us on a regular basis, and they have often interacted with our students in a variety of activities. We also supplement the mid-day meal for the local primary school. Students of all ages have enjoyed the hospitality of the residents of Varadenahalli, to have a cup of tea, to understand each others' lives and listen to stories.

We have already mentioned how the excursions are an opportunity for all of us to come in touch with people living in very different milieus from our own.

It is a conscious part of our education to sensitize students to the realities of the world around them, while at the same time helping them to engage constructively, albeit in small ways, in social and environmental work. We have been fortunate to have close and intense interactions with various organizations across India who work with passion on social and environmental issues. These organizations have given generously of their time, energy and resources in educating us in these areas. What we appreciate most is the open and affectionate way in which they engage with us, and our mutual understanding that education must play a crucial role in the transformation of society.



# Alumni profiles

## DEVIAH AIAMA

### CLASS OF 1998

I am currently a programme officer with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an inter-governmental and civil society organisation that finds pragmatic solutions to global conservation and development challenges. I work on advising bioenergy policy and project developments to include appropriate measures that protect biodiversity, value ecosystem services, and improve access to sustainable energy equitably. Prior to this, I worked as a policy analyst for the Government of Canada (Department of Natural Resources) on climate change, renewable energy and sustainable forestry policy development. I have an interdisciplinary Masters degree in Environmental Studies, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Biology, both from Queen's University in Canada. I attended CFL while growing up in Bangalore, from 1993 to 1998.

CFL was much more than an educational experience. Its balanced approach to academic and extra-curricular pursuits enabled me to identify my environmental interests early on. For example, CFL's "School in the Forest" program (in partnership with the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary, Wynad) created a lasting awareness of conservation and sustainable living. CFL provided encouragement and opportunities for me to explore these interests. I was also exposed to a lively exploration of music, dance, theatre and fine arts. I still miss the thrill of performing on stage! In addition to a high standard of academic training, CFL also provided forums for meaningful introspection through regular dialogues between teachers and students. Conversations that inspired me to better understand my thoughts, emotions and actions – this learning continues.

My CFL experience has had a profound influence on me, both educational and personally enriching.

~ August 2005

## RICHA BHAVANAM

### CLASS OF 2011

It is hardly surprising that CFL is my home in many ways, given that I spent thirteen years there.

But, it is not just that. While it seems somewhat redundant to say that my schooling years played a defining role in shaping me, I cannot deny that I have gone back to my education at CFL as a reference point for various choices that I have made

over the years. And, in making these choices, I have very much appreciated the space to pause and reflect in situations that are otherwise teeming with pressures and expectations. This is most definitely a quality that is rooted in my schooling, where the attempt to be watchful of ourselves and our surroundings became as much a part of our daily lives as any other school activity.

Having said this, there were periodic bouts of unhappiness and dissatisfaction at various points in my time at CFL; home-sickness, an urge to experience the 'freedom' of the outside world, disagreement about certain stances and boundaries... Yet, there was something that kept me there. In hindsight, I suspect it was the sense of thinking together as a community and listening to one another that bound me to the place. And it is this sense of thinking together that I value and hope to inculcate in all my interactions.

This was the reason that I chose to study Philosophy at St Stephen's College, where the class sizes were extremely small and the course was discussion oriented. Post this, I moved back to Bangalore and followed the urge to explore photography. I now work as a freelancer, mainly in the fields of photography and film. I most enjoy working on themes connected to humanities and nature.

My work and interests are strongly based on exposures that took place during my senior school years, which was the most vivid period of my education. The liberty to design my own programme allowed me to fuse a handpicked variety of academic subjects along with other activities, including photography.

My biggest learning from CFL's way of education, might be the idea that the process of questioning is itself relevant, sometimes more so than specific questions or answers themselves. This idea yields a sensitive and receptive mind, which for me, is fundamental to how I would like to navigate my path.

~ August 2019

## ADITI CHANDRASEKAR

### CLASS OF 2005

I joined Centre for Learning (CFL) at the age of six, and for the next 12 years I was a learner there. When I joined, CFL was a day school and just before I entered my teens, CFL entered its own campus at Vardenahalli village. From then onwards, it has been a residential campus, which served to enhance the effect of the school environment on all the

residents. As a teenager, it was a ripe time for me to take in and question the various aspects of the multi-faceted education and interactions within our small and close-knit community.

Just a little background about myself, to put things in perspective: In my high school I decided to be a teacher of science and mathematics. I went on to study an Integrated MS in chemistry at IISER and then taught IIT aspirants for a year. Later I worked at Azim Premji University, helping them set up their science undergraduate programme. I have now completed my PhD in Chemistry from Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research, Kalpakkam. During my PhD, I worked on the experimental and quantum chemical aspects of nuclear fuel reprocessing.

For my generation, teaching is not in the set of most attractive career options, and neither does it have a promise of quick money. Nevertheless, I strive towards my dream of being a science educator. I don't worry about what is a smarter way to live, or who is better off than I am. This is not an attitude I cultivated, but an attitude that I grew into at CFL. It was not taught in a classroom in so many words, but by an environment that does not believe in competition, and that taught me that motivation from within was far more important.

CFL has a non-hierarchical structure that functions on collective discussion and decision making, where the student-teacher divide only exists for functional purposes. Such a system sounds like it would waste a lot of time and get people nowhere in the end. It is to be seen to be believed, how much it nurtures and develops an individual's growth. Today I have the courage to question and express my own feelings, and equally respect the concerns of others (sometimes even in critical circumstances) because there was no power equation in my school, and hence in my head.

There were activities like "culture class" and "quiet time" that I found trying and wanted to avoid as a student. At that time I felt it was a complete waste of time. Now I have partially realised that they might have been meaningful sessions. There is, of course, a set of ideas that some students cannot comprehend and might even dislike. As the environment provides the forum to express one's opinion freely, there is a danger of the occasional student turning out to be a rebel. This was something that was an occasional worry to me, though on the other hand there is no control experiment where it can be understood what the same student might have turned out to be if they were in the so called "mainstream."

There is no guarantee that a student from CFL would do something that makes an enormous difference, but for myself

I can say that whatever I do, I do it and look at it with an attitude and spirit that makes all the difference. This is the biggest and lasting contribution that my school has given to me!

~ August 2019

## NIKHIL FERNANDES

### CLASS OF 2003

After I left CFL, I attended Colgate University, a liberal arts college in New York state. I received a BA in Physics, with a minor in Applied Mathematics, and graduated in 2008. While at Colgate, I did research on laser optics and superconductor physics, and I volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, an organization that builds houses for low-income families and helps rebuild after natural disasters. After Colgate, I joined Cornell University for a PhD in Applied Physics, and I study novel nanocomposite materials with a view towards alternative (solar and geothermal) energy applications, a field I hope to eventually work in.

CFL has been such a large part of my life, both at home and at school, that it's hard to separate its impact on my life from everything else. I do think that CFL has given me the ability to introspect, the gift of emotional detachment, and the curse of having to say "Nothing, really" when asked what I'm thinking about when I become quiet.

Looking back with a few years of distance, perhaps the single most important thing I've taken away from CFL is not a lesson I learned at school, but the example set by the people who gave up their time, and in many cases otherwise lucrative careers, to fill a need they saw. Of all the things about CFL that may have changed the direction of my life, that may well prove to be the most significant.

~ August 2009

## MINTI JAIN

### CLASS OF 1999

I completed my Master's in Environmental Conservation Management, after which I assisted a few projects at Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment, Bangalore. I later joined Down to Earth Magazine, a wing of Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. I worked there as



senior reporter, which entailed traveling to different states in India and reporting on urban issues. At present I'm working for Saahas, where we do waste management across Bangalore.

During my school years, I was described as a very quiet and shy person. I did however, have a part within that was bursting to express itself, but something held me back. Perhaps it was fear of being anything less than perfect. But I also had the determination to overcome all my fears, however big or small. The atmosphere at CFL certainly assisted me to grow on this path.

At CFL I was encouraged to be myself and discover what that is rather than 'become' something. There was a lot of space and opportunity for this to happen. Apart from many extracurricular activities, we were exposed to a range of work environments and societal situations that broadened our horizons. Even the academics were taught in a way that encouraged a lot of self-learning and minimized peer comparison or pressure from teachers to produce any pre-determined results. At the same time one's limits were pushed equally in every direction, whether it was mathematics, sports, helping with the daily chores of sweeping and mopping or regarding each one's behavior toward the other... nothing was neglected. We had scheduled class time when we were left to do no activity but just sit and observe what was happening around and inside. And there were sessions when we had to share our observations, feelings, thoughts, problems; this really helped to look closely within and at one's behavioral tendencies. School meant a space where learning took place for both students and teachers. There was no punishment for any 'wrong' doing. I found it very clever of the teachers to make the students themselves feel responsible for what they did. This was much more effective in producing corrective action and in later years to be able to make one's own decisions with some clarity. This also gives very little space for blaming anyone else for one's action.

~ August 2009

## ARJUN JAYADEV

### CLASS OF 1994

I am a Professor of Economics at Azim Premji University. I was an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts, Boston before that. I was a post-doc at Columbia University and received my PhD from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

I was one of the first batch of A-level students at CFL. It was a wonderful few years, partly because the school was finding

its feet at that time and things were gloriously unstructured. I very much felt like part of the adventure that the teachers had undertaken. The relationships that I built with my classmates and my teachers were and are among the most special in my life.

CFL was much more than a school. It was (and is) a vibrant community of people who had the courage to break away from the imperatives of society and in doing so gave everyone—students and teachers alike—the chance to explore deeply together some of the most compelling questions that arise in life in a happy and caring environment. Even if I was not aware of it at the time, this was an extraordinary gift.

For most people, school prepares you at best for a career. For me, CFL provided me with the confidence to explore my interests outside that box. More crucially, the questions which were asked in CFL about life and relationship militate against glib answers. They are things which I carry about with me unconsciously.

A full quarter century has passed since I left CFL. I find that age doesn't necessarily bring wisdom. The world continues in its ways and I in mine, all the time looking for more clarity on the questions of how best to live this life. The questions remain, even if unanswered.

~ August 2019

## AMAY NARAYAN

### CLASS OF 2010

In some ways, pinning down how a "CFL education" impacts and informs one's life is a very tough ask. Much of what one imbibes from the school is intangible, and sometimes you realise only several years later how you have been influenced by the education. Nonetheless, I shall attempt it.

I graduated from CFL in 2010, having gone through my entire schooling there. Upon leaving, I had a keen interest in learning music as well as pursuing my academic interests. I moved to Bombay and joined St. Xavier's College, while continuing to learn Hindustani Classical music. While I thoroughly enjoyed living on my own in a new city, and learning music, the curriculum at St. Xavier's seemed dry and devoid of any inspiration. I dropped out and applied to universities in the UK. I then finished my BSc in Economics from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, and then completed my MA in Economics from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. I then decided to move back to Bangalore instead of working abroad and have spent the last few years working as a research fellow at Azim Premji University.

For me, CFL's education is neither a means to an end, nor some extremely abstract concept/experience that one tends to leave behind after finishing school. I say "for me" because being part of CFL is a deeply subjective experience, and every student feels it differently. In my own life, I have tried to simplify the ideas and processes that began in my schooldays and found new ways of relating with them over different stages of my life. It can feel overwhelming, and somewhat distant, to think about "well-being", "the self", "finding peace", in a grand, macro sense. For the majority of us graduates (me included), we end up subject to the usual stresses of life: getting jobs, earning a livelihood, developing deep relationships, raising families. I don't personally believe that detaching oneself from this "mainstream" is in any way an answer in itself. Instead, I increasingly feel that the power of CFL education lies in being able to relate to it from a myriad different realities and standpoints. Whether you are a banker, a doctor, a teacher, or working in an NGO, it does not necessarily change the questions one grapples with.

To still be able to engage constructively with these ideas in the everyday, I have tried to explore them in the microcosm of my own daily life. This has been a deeply fruitful experience, and as with all such processes, it leaves you with more questions than answers: What does it mean for me to live responsibly? To be sensitive, open, reflective? To understand my own emotions better? I explore these questions for myself at a very simple, practical level. It might mean delving into an unpleasant interaction, or a tough relationship, to figure out why I react a certain way. It might mean asking myself honestly if I really do need whatever I am ordering on Amazon. It might mean swallowing pride, apologising, and owning up to a mistake. These are challenges I face regularly and having a schema to approach them which, I hope, helps me develop as a person over time, is invaluable.

By starting on this small scale, I have found this method eminently useful. It allows for a critical, honest appraisal of oneself in the everyday. It allows, hopefully, for me to reinvent myself periodically, learning from my own patterns and past. It allows me to meet life's uncertainties and my own uncertainties and insecurities about myself with both humility and confidence. Most importantly, it let me recognise that these questions, emotions, patterns are universal, and there is no single truth or right answer to any of them. In times of struggle, this has helped me have a perspective that lets me distance myself from my own churning and understand the struggle through a completely new lens. My troubles seem to always be at the centre of my universe, but it is so easy to feel like it is the centre of the universe.

CFL gave me a lot to grapple with. One could argue that it made life harder! Perhaps living would be far easier without this lifelong, often torturous process of wrestling with oneself. CFL also gave me other precious things, like a love for being outdoors and in nature, a stunningly good academic experience, and several deep, meaningful lifelong relationships with both peers and adults. However, by helping me start down this road of simple self-discovery, if one can call it that, CFL gave me a strategy, a schema, to tackle each day of ordinary life, one at a time. It is more than I could ever have wished for.

~ August 2019

## INI PERIODI

### CLASS OF 2011

I dived into my Bachelor's (in Communications Studies) right after school. Having been exposed to both the corporate world through college and the NGO world throughout my life, I realized during my year off, that education was perhaps the best balance for me as a career possibility. The field seemed optimistic, challenging and exciting enough. This led me to pursue my MA in Education at Azim Premji University. I have also been extremely privileged with all the learning spaces that I have been a part of, and taking up education seemed like the best way of giving back what I had received all my life.

I graduated from APU in 2017, carrying with me several interests that I had picked up during the two years there; love for sociology, children's literature and empowering people through making knowledge accessible. The work that I do now involves each of these areas, both independently and as a combination at times. I teach sociology to 11th and 12th graders at a school called Creative, and I am also involved in the Kannada translation initiative at APU. I have slowly started venturing into work related to children's literature, dissemination of the same and library work after completing a Library Educator's Course in Goa.

I have always considered myself very lucky to have found a home and a family in CFL. At every stage, as I moved from one educational institution to another, I have observed different aspects of the school's philosophy get highlighted and challenged in my own head. And it is reassuring that CFL is a space that is not afraid of letting its students or alumni question it endlessly at any point. In fact, it sows the first seeds of that. And because one carries this sense of skepticism wherever one goes, it becomes difficult to accept/take anything blindly; but at the same time, it makes it also



extremely easy to be open to new ideas, experiences and challenges, simply because one is able to take oneself less seriously and be less rigid. That is perhaps my biggest take away from school.

The idea of ‘watching patterns of thoughts and emotions’ has only taken different meanings as I have grown up and made sense at a deeper and deeper level. And this in itself has been an interesting journey. All the other spaces that I have been a part of, have contributed to and revealed different facets of the question. But I’m grateful to CFL for instilling it in me in the first place. And it is these very values that dared me to feel my way through life and be micro ambitious, doing things that has given me peace and meaning at the point of time without perhaps compromising on rigour. It has relieved me from the pressures and stresses associated with high ambition and success, because it becomes possible to question the very nature of that ambition itself.

~ August 2019

## **NANDINI RAM MOHAN**

### **CLASS OF 1995**

I have been working with various NGOs as a designer in textiles and beadwork. I have also been working as a teacher trainer for rural women and have been involved with design oriented training and with the marketing of products. My work has taken me to various parts of the country such as Gujarat, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, and also to Ethiopia.

I am currently in Bangalore working with schools and doing craft work with children.

CFL allowed me to pursue my interests in a non-academic direction. It gave me various experiences in the art world and encouraged me to follow my instincts. I experienced many other dimensions of life in the school: travel, hostel life, handling problems, just allowing events to happen. We were never protected as students. We were always encouraged to go and find out for ourselves and not to be passive.

Something valuable I learned at CFL was to treat all individuals equally. This attitude helped me in my work—in a village you relate to people as they are, not as someone entirely different from you. Similarly, in schools, each child is who he or she is and is accepted as such.

This attitude helped me, in my teaching and other work, to bring every individual’s artistic ability out, regardless of his or her level.

~ August 2005

## **SHABARI RAO**

### **CLASS OF 1999**

Has it been 20 years since I graduated from CFL?

Yes, it has.

And just like a good pickle, my experiences as a student there have soaked right into who I am and it’s difficult to separate the mango from the spices!

At this stage of my life, I think of myself primarily as a researcher: my work is driven by questions and curiosities. I am interested in the potential and role of the body in learning, in knowledge production, and as a site of knowing. The theoretical structures that my work is grounded in are theories of performance, embodiment, education and phenomenology. Performance is the medium or language of my work. Education and performance are the contexts in which I work. And sometimes, I write.

My interests, in some measure, have been shaped by the questions and experiences that CFL provided. Questions around identity and self; experiences rooted in the body and art.

The ability to resist defining my work through easy categories comes, at least in part, from being comfortable with uncertainty, being able to question the ‘way things are’, and having trust that it makes sense somehow: all qualities that are embodied by the project undertaken by the CFL community.

And yet, CFL is not a constant. It has changed and evolved a lot over the years, as any dynamic entity will. CFL now is not what it was in the 1990s and neither is the world! Still, my experiences and memories as one of the first students of the school are precious to me, and shape me in ways that are revealed to me in different aspects and stages of my life.

~ August 2019

## **ANANDA SIDDHARTHA**

### **CLASS OF 2007**

I still remember my first exposure to CFL. My father and I had driven to Shibumi and as we walked through the gates I wondered whether he had gotten the wrong address. The campus reminded me more of our farm than the schools that I was used to seeing in the city. We wandered around, peering into the classrooms and looking at the various trees that were growing. While the older students were in class, many of the younger ones were outdoors, playing on the jungle

gym, climbing trees and generally having a blast. Everybody looked so happy. I wanted to be a part of it. Luckily, a couple of months later I was accepted as a student and went on to spend an incredible ten years at the school, a period in my life which has really defined me as a person.

After graduating from CFL, I went on to complete an undergraduate degree, a post-graduate diploma in Journalism and a Masters from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. I have now applied to a PhD program.

Although I valued my time while I was still studying in CFL, my appreciation for the school grew after I graduated. Joining the rat race made me realise that I had not left a school, but a vibrant community where each person was given the time, space and where necessary, support they needed to discover themselves. The myriad extra-curricular activities on offer and a large campus to explore really gave one the freedom to find and follow their passion.

At times, I was a slow learner but that didn't stop the teachers from putting in the extra time and effort needed to bring me up to speed. This was in sharp contrast to my time in college where it was very easy to be left behind. The fact that the number of students in my class was almost twice the number of students in the whole of CFL didn't help!

Although days at CFL were structured, there was never a sense of rigidity. It never felt like we were forced into doing things. A part of the daily routine at CFL, quiet time, was something I enjoyed and still find the time for a couple of times a week. Being at CFL, one was naturally connected to the land. This still remains. We have a number of plants both within and on the balcony of our home.

The time we were afforded to explore the flora and fauna on the campus has left a permanent mark on the way I think about the relationship between humans and their natural surroundings. After completing my master's I have worked with organisations which have been involved with issues of forest governance, forest policy, tribal rights, food security and agriculture. I am currently working with an environmental research organisation in Bangalore where I am exploring how current approaches of wildlife conservation are affecting the livelihoods of people.

Looking back, what I appreciate the most are the values that were instilled: the respect for fellow human beings and the natural world. Finding like-minded people is something that I have found hard to come by which is why my closest friends are still from CFL.

~ August 2019

## **KRISHNA SOMASHEKAR**

### **CLASS OF 1995**

I am an industrial design and development consultant for products that are typically electronic accessories. I help individuals and organisations who own intellectual property in their effort to building products. What I bring to this effort include: knowledge of materials, manufacturing processes, embedded electronics, embedded software and industrial design. I get involved from the initial conceptualization of a product up until the finished product rolls out of an assembly line.

During my CFL experience I had a lot of catching up to do because of my learning disabilities. I of course also faced many hurdles and challenges that one encounters when growing up. But I always had the feeling that I belonged to a very responsible community and I accepted most of the responsibilities that came along with it.

Looking back at my CFL experience, I consider myself very fortunate to have grown up in CFL. The school is probably responsible for making me take up a lot of ownership and pride in what I do. Ownership, pride, thoroughness and some good fortune seem to be the fundamentals for a job well done. In short CFL worked out well for me.

~ August 2019

## **ANNA THEUERKAUF**

### **CLASS OF 2003**

After finishing school in 2003, I taught at Srishti, an educational institute for children with special needs. I was the class teacher for a pre-vocational unit in the age group of 12 to 14. The group consisted of ten children with Downs syndrome and mental retardation. Our goal at Srishti was to help them live independently to the extent possible. At the moment, I am looking at working with children with physical disabilities.

I can't yet evaluate the impact CFL has had on my life and work. Since I haven't yet experienced any other systems in a strong way, I can't really say. But I lived in CFL for half my life and it felt like my family. People helped me in many ways, both big and small, and this has made me what I am today. The place taught me to think for myself and pursue my own interests. It made me feel that my interests are as valuable as anything else.

~ August 2005



## ALOK UTSAV

### CLASS OF 2010

I'm a freelance cinematographer and filmmaker. I tell stories through film, and help others tell theirs. I also run a production house for film and video content in Bangalore.

I came to CFL from a "conventional" school at the age of 13, so I had had a taste of mainstream education. At no point during my CFL days did I ever look back and wonder about what could have been. I wholeheartedly embraced the freedom it had to offer, though it took me time to recalibrate. All through my childhood and well into my teens, I struggled with setting goals, expectations and achieving deadlines, despite a lot of support and input from the system. In hindsight, I definitely didn't overcome these hurdles and patterns during my time in school. What I took away from school were a set of tools that clicked into gear later in life.

I graduated from CFL in 2010, and joined Srishti School of Art Design and Technology without too much of an idea of what I wanted to be. The transition from CFL to a relatively rigid college structure, with grades, peers, competition, and unforgiving deadlines really helped me to put a lot of what I had picked up in school into perspective. The switch wasn't easy, but I found myself approaching and engaging with my own work differently than I had before. Luckily for me, art and design require heavy amounts of (self indulgent) introspection, communication, questioning motives and downright getting my hands dirty to get anywhere satisfactory.

I always had an interest in photography and film, and it was actively nurtured and developed in school. I was exposed to art, theatre, photography, incredibly diverse people, environments and locations, which broadened my horizons and helped kickstart my art practice.

In Srishti, I majored in film, while experimenting with natural building, product design, animation and user experience in college. I finished art school in 2015, and I've been freelancing since.

I've had a very eventful and blossoming professional career as a filmmaker. It takes me all over the country to shoot sports, concerts, advertisements, documentaries, short films, corporate films etc. Once in a while I do stop, question and reassess my bearings, to make sure I haven't lost my voice. It's a privilege that I recognise and acknowledge, that I know I can afford because of my background. I'd like to believe that my education keeps me somewhat grounded, self-aware and constantly questioning. Although I'm told I deserve a kick once in a while.

~ August 2019

## LAKSHMI VISWANATHA

### CLASS OF 2002

I passed out of CFL in 2002 and went on to graduate in 2005 in English Literature, Communicative English, and Psychology. I then completed an Master's in Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, in 2007. I have been working in the development sector for more than a decade now. In the past eight years, my work has been in the field of maternal and child health, with a special focus on health and its intersectionalities with gender and equity.

My parents admitted me to CFL when I was 8 years old. Coming from a conventional school with uniforms, textbooks and strict teachers, this set-up was entirely novel. While academics was an integral part of this education, other aspects, like being fit, "quiet time" and cleaning up school, were given equal importance. CFL was liberating for me, from the confinement of classrooms and the strict decorum that was required to be followed in most other schools.

For the first 5 years or so, I didn't really understand the need or significance of "quiet time". But gradually, I realized that it had become an integral component of my life, and on days when it was absent, it made me feel incomplete. Further, the structure of CFL helped me embark on an endless journey of introspection. I also saw that responsibility and freedom are two sides of the same coin and appreciated the holistic perspective with which we were being educated.

I consider myself very lucky to have had the opportunity to go to a school like CFL. It was not so much what the teachers said, but what they did not say, that has shaped me. So while it is hard to highlight the tangible difference(s) that CFL has made in my life, I can safely say that it has aided my discovery of a way of living, which I cherish. There is a sense of clarity and security, which enables me to question and respond to life and its various challenges.

~ August 2019

# People at CFL

## Founders



Standing: (Left to Right) Venu, Vijaya Lakshmi, Yasmin, Richard and Vandana  
Seated: (Left to Right) Kabir, Valli, Kamala, Usha and Ananthaswamy

**Venu** was a member of the founding group of CFL and was a member of the Governing Council till 2019. He has degrees in engineering from the University of Madras and management from Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. An interest in Krishnamurti's teachings led him to leave the corporate sector and join The Valley School in 1989 and later become part of the group that started CFL. In CFL, Venu was a teacher and also had administrative, legal and financial responsibilities. In 2010 he was invited by Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore to be part of the core group envisioning Azim Premji University. Venu is currently the Director of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University and a member of its Board of Management.

**Vijaya Lakshmi Jaithirtha** has a PhD in English literature and has taught middle and senior classes in Krishnamurti schools for more than 25 years. She was with CFL right from its inception in 1990 up until 2004. Currently, she teaches at Shibumi school, of which she is a founding member too.

**Yasmin Jayathirtha** has an MSc from IIT, Bombay and a PhD in chemistry from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. She did postdoctoral work at the University of Louisville and the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. She is interested in science education, particularly in developing experimental activities using simple materials. She writes regularly on science activities, and is currently involved in the teacher education programme at Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

**Richard Fernandes** has a MSc in Physics from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur and a PhD from the Raman Research Institute, Bangalore. He was a research associate at the University of Louisville and later worked at the Indian

Institute of Science, Bangalore. At CFL, he developed an experimental curriculum for teaching physics from middle school onwards, substantially with home built apparatus, thereby debunking the notion that experiments require big money equipment. He currently teaches undergraduate physics in the School of Arts and Sciences, Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

**Vandana Srivastava** worked in the private sector after completing her MBA at the Asian Institute of Management, Manila, Philippines. Her deep interest in working with young children led her to join The Valley School, and she was later part of the founding group of CFL. She helped develop and implement the junior school curriculum and worked closely with children of all ages. In addition, she held various administrative responsibilities till 2019. Currently, in addition to pursuing her interests in pottery, stitching and painting, Vandana is developing and conducting workshops to bring mindfulness practices in some of the schools in Bangalore.

**Kabir Jaithirtha** (1949 – 2018), a BSc and PGDM (IIM Calcutta) graduate, was a trustee of the KFI (Krishnamurti Foundation India). He had over 35 years of experience as a teacher and administrator in KFI schools, CFL and Shibumi. He was with CFL right from its inception in 1990 up until 2002 and was one of the founding members of Shibumi school.

**Valli Seshan** has spent a large part of her working life with non-governmental organisations engaged in development work. She has worked for Action Aid, helped start SEARCH and coordinated the International Resource Centre of Service Civil International. She actively participates in thinking about the educational vision of CFL, and has been a huge support ever since the idea of the school emerged in the minds of



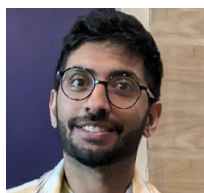
the founding group. CFL functioned from her farm 'Shibumi' just outside the city till it moved to the current campus in Varadenahalli.

**Kamala Subramaniam**, or simply 'Kamalaji' as she is fondly referred to now, has worked with children all her life. Beginning with Children's Garden School, Chennai, then Vidyaranya, Hyderabad and ending with CFL, with a long Valley School stint thrown in the mix, she has been an integral part of most of the schools right from their inception. CFL in fact began on the terrace of her house and even today the walls of '462' resonate with the sounds of adults and children alike. An avid reader, she continues to be interested in education; she is involved with Shibumi and has volunteered at Parikrama.

**Usha Mukunda** completed her BA (Hons) in English Literature from Presidency College, Kolkata. After a gap of 20 years, she ventured back to the University to complete her Master's degree in librarianship from Bangalore University. Usha initiated the concept, spirit and actuality of the open library at CFL and thereafter at diverse schools. She is deeply interested in nurturing discerning readers and users of the library, not only at CFL but in all places where children abide.

**M K Anantha Swamy** grew up in a business family in Bangalore, and was first introduced to J Krishnamurti's work in 1956 when he attended the philosopher's public talk in Chennai. He was associated with the activities of the Krishnamurti Foundation India and was instrumental in helping found the Bangalore Education Centre (1974) and the Valley School (1978) of which he was the secretary for 12 years. He was part of a group of several teachers from the Valley School who decided to start Centre for Learning in 1990. Although he retired from his business activities in 2010, he continues his association with these educational institutions.

# People at CFL



**Ajay Madappat** has a Master's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Duisburg-Essen. At CFL he is interested in learning and teaching physics, mathematics and the humanities.



**Devika Bedi** is an alumna of CFL, where she completed her senior school education. She was a part of Aagaaz Theatre Trust in Delhi for five years and has worked in community engagement and explored the use of art in education and therapy. She teaches art, handwork, theatre, and languages to junior and middle school children.



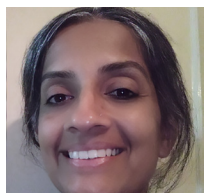
**Kamala Mukunda** completed her PhD in educational psychology from Syracuse University and has taught at the undergraduate level for four years. At CFL, she teaches psychology and statistics and is also involved with a range of activities with the juniors and middle schoolers.



**Kavya A Biradar** has a Bachelor's degree in education from IGNOU and an MA from Dharwad University. She teaches languages at CFL. She is interested in the literatures of various languages.



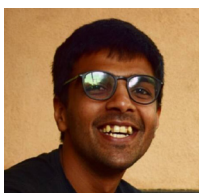
**Keerthi Mukunda** received her Master's degree in education from the University of Massachusetts and taught for a few years in a public school in Amherst before joining CFL. She has a particular interest in teaching and developing curricula in the areas of English and social studies.



**Nagini Prasad** worked in the corporate and non-profit sectors before teaching at various unconventional schools. At CFL, she works primarily with the middle and high school children.



**Prayaag Joshi** is a Chartered Accountant. At CFL he teaches social science, environmental management and statistics and is also involved with the junior and middle schoolers in a range of activities.



**Rhythm Parikh** has studied English literature and politics during his undergraduate at Nottingham Trent University. He then went on to study education at Azim Premji University. At CFL, he is interested in teaching and learning language, literature, social studies, sports and theatre. He is also interested in understanding what creating the right environment for learning means and entails.



**Rupa Suresh** has a Master's degree in Human Resource and is trained in the Montessori method of teaching young children. She teaches English, mathematics and craft in the junior and middle school.



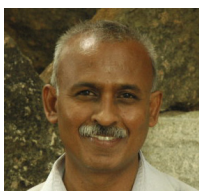
**Sachin Mishra** has a Master's degree in Energy Engineering. Prior to joining CFL, he has taught engineering. He is involved in teaching sciences at the middle and high school level. He is interested in travelling, natural farming and frisbee.



**Shashidhar Jagadeeshan** has a PhD in mathematics from Syracuse University. He has taught mathematics to students from middle school to undergraduate level.

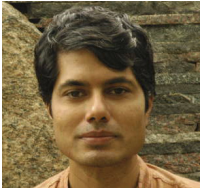


**Sourima Chakraborty** has a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering from the National Institute of Technology, Durgapur. She went on to pursue research studies from IIT Kanpur, alongside working as a teaching assistant. At CFL, she is exploring chemistry and biology with middle and senior schoolers.



**Therlingappa:** After working with a design engineer for a few years in a small-scale industrial unit in Bengaluru, Therlingappa moved on to work with an NGO. His work at this organisation involved improving the livelihoods of landless farmer communities through sustainable agricultural practices. At CFL, he handles the administration work of the office. He is interested in watching films, plays, reading books on developmental issues, traveling and in establishing public relations.





**Venkatesh Onkar** has an MA in English literature. At CFL, he mainly teaches history and sociology.



**Zeus Ghosh** has a Bachelor's degree in Civil engineering from the National Institute of Technology, Durgapur. He has worked with construction firms and with IIM Indore prior to joining CFL. At CFL, he is exploring mathematics, physics and art.



Our support staff, who have been with us over so many years (from left to right):  
**Nagaraja, Siddappa, Chandru, Raja.**

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