



Meeting ‘otherness’

The moment Gray Fire stopped I gripped his arm. “Who are they?”

“Strangers,” he replied. I had heard that word used before but like many grown-up expressions, it didn’t mean anything special to me. I thought strangers were some kind of make-believe beings, like the talking animals parents told their children about or the creature who is supposed to be half-fish and half-human.

“Strangers are real?” Even the sound was lumpy on my tongue, as if I had tasted food that was not properly cooked.

“Oh yes. They are like us, but they are not us.” Gray Fire answered in a distracted tone.

(Sees Behind Trees by Michael Dorris is a Native American story set in Northeastern United States some few hundred years ago).

How does it even come to be that we consider each other strangers? It appears that the need for belonging is one thing that drives a lot of our actions as human beings, and consequently leads to a who-is-in and who-is-out movement, a coding and labeling of someone as an outcast, a stranger. This clear boundary defines a them and an us.

We have drawn social boundaries ever since we inhabited the earth. For thousands of years, our human species has been conditioned to see the ‘other’ as different from oneself, to separate the other as alien, and to see family or tribe as an extension of that same ‘oneself’. Maybe this was to protect oneself or one’s own group. The form that the other has taken has morphed over the millennia, beginning perhaps with another species of humans (such as the Neanderthals) to another tribe, to another caste, another class, another race, another culture, another sexual orientation, another language, another dialect within the same language... the list can be endless! As Toni Morrison, the American writer says: ‘Race is the classification of a species, and we are the human race, period. Then what is this other thing – the hostility, the social racism, the othering?’

So, what is this othering? Where is its beginning and where is its end? The movement of ‘othering’ is the act of seeing another group as having an identity different from one’s own based on, for example, skin colour, class, caste, livelihood, culture, language, background. Such criteria on a group level exist, but, even on an individual level I look with



divisiveness, often feeling separation in a friend or family member. Upon my search to unravel these threads, I see a separateness in all my fields of perception.

At school, in a session with 11 year-olds after a field trip, we came to the question: what makes you feel different from the other person? One of the children blurted out in response: 'Basically, someone who is not ME!' Perhaps she had meant, 'someone who is not like me'. But her simple statement said it all, just like Gray Fire in the Native American context from a few hundred years ago! Feeling separate is the point in question. There is also the hyper-need we have to find similarities of culture, appearance, experience and background, which unfortunately overshadow the humanness of being one, being together. At school we nurture a space where children and adults can observe these movements of separation while immersed in the ups and downs of daily life.

Don't we condition our children to see through the lens of othering? We label each other based on this lens and then that person does not rise up in our eyes and become more than what we have labeled. So we appear surprised when the label is challenged! Once I tell the story or define the other person or group according to my definition and according to a difference that I seek to see (creating an image), it limits who they are and what their multiple narratives might be. The Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who uses the term multiple narratives, says in a talk, 'There is a danger of a single story'; the story of Africa being one of tragedy or poverty, the story of an African American being one of crime. We have this image, this stereotype that is fixed and doesn't allow multiple narratives of that person. Or how about allowing no narrative at all; just a perception of a

person - without naming and labeling?

When further exploring what this movement of othering involves, we notice that this is an act of measurement. We look at the 'other' being either greater or lesser than myself (do I enjoy power or experience subordination?) It is an act of qualifying what that person is with regard to my status or position. Depending on that, I either look down on, look up to, respect or disrespect. Action towards the other comes from this definition I have made and qualification I have decided upon. I feel pity, I feel admiration, I might feel disgust, I might feel envy. This act of identification plays out in school, through inclusion or exclusion, and then, associated feelings ensue. Children, like us adults, create cliques or clubs, based on cultural markers such as movies seen, music enjoyed, and even choice of foods!

More acutely in classes, other factors that play out are discriminations based on different abilities. Children often navigate their social realm through measurement. They size each other up. They understand each other through a measure of abilities. However, at school we do not institutionally segregate based on ability or capacity, and we provide many opportunities for shared experience like trips, walks, residential living, dialogue and so on. Given this wide shared experience at school, why does the mind stay small in its perceptions?

Another way we segregate in society is to define the other as *not normal*. Are these fixed because of the majority group? The boundary line in this case is being drawn by one group and allows privilege to that group, it seems. The criterion could be sexual orientation for example. With children we talk about the transgender community, whom we meet at traffic lights and tollbooths. What are our reactions and feelings and why? Imagine, we have defined ourselves through

sexual orientation and then created the 'other'! By reading groups this way, we dismiss others. If we stepped away and perceived the root of this to be a human consciousness issue (and not based on who you are) with a deep conditioning to see separateness, could one peel away many layers of identity to reveal this root, and could strongly held beliefs and feelings wither away? What would it mean to respond with compassion to *any other* rather than sizing people up based on the mental lists we tuck away?

While we say we need to suspend labels and criteria, it is a fact that we as a school are an affluent space within a vast rural context here on our campus. Yes, we do need to acknowledge the urban lives we have come from, the privileges we have enjoyed, the cultural and monetary spring boards we take for granted. These impact the way we see those who have come from a different set of conditions, in the wider society here. We might 'read' the other groups as lower class, being deprived of something, struggling, preserving religion and tradition. We create stories here: the story of a lower caste dalit being downtrodden, the stories of rural India, the story of an adivasi tribal group. We might want to *give* and *do* something for them. In this complex picture, how do we enable students to reveal their prejudices, build a bridge or sharpen their perceptions of the other, and then and only then, formulate action?

One statement we have come across in society and in school, is, 'I am originally from here' ('here' being the Indian subcontinent)! We did a middle school social science project with an 8th standard group titled "Where are you from?," exploring assumptions about people and place, unpacking our limited pictures of nationality, appearances, race, blood and backgrounds. We asked questions of the children to check assumptions (What does an Indian look like? Where is home for you?) and then we would interview and meet people whose lives had taken them through different spaces, countries and experiences and hence blurred the lines of nationality, belonging and homeland. Blurring the lines was uncomfortable for some of the children who wanted certainty and identity fixed! At one point we looked at a documentary about DNA evidence showing the movement of early humans through continents: Africa, Asia, Australia. We as a species have been moving, settling, moving, settling and moving again. The notion that only some people in India are *meant* to be here as this is their homeland was exploded. There were no privileges based on blood type or race since you were informed that you could check your DNA and trace which group of wandering human beings you had descended from!

Our social studies projects in the middle school are an attempt to provide a balanced picture for the children, by integrating lots of outside trips, talking with people, relating

and building relationships, and unpacking assumptions and prejudices. The aim of this curriculum is to connect with the world around, local and global; to nurture a sensitivity towards people we are less familiar with; to develop critical thinking skills and an ability to express the basis of our opinions, thoughts and understanding. In our approach, we value the learning that grows from contact with people and places, learning based on our own encounters and processing. In a similar vein, we have valued working with primary material, and with multiple sources or voices of a particular time.

We want to question narrativizing itself, the process of creating a story of the other or oneself for that matter, the movement of the mind to see divisiveness and separation even in the smallest of groups. In questioning and exploring, we are wary of a sensitization process for children, where we help them tolerate others, one group at a time, so that they become sensitive to all. Rather we throw light on the framework in the mind where the separateness begins, where the lens is formed and where the act of othering springs from. Tolerance Education, as it is sometimes called, runs the risk of still labeling and the questions might arise: Tolerance of whom? Based on what descriptions? If we nurture care and compassion without measurement can there be an insight where *othering* ends?



Curry Kolambu (Tamil for mutton masala gravy) aka Curriculum Meetings at CFL

Imagine a group of fifteen to twenty people, aged anywhere between 26 and 65 years, mostly teachers, sitting together in discussion and dialogue. Talking and reflecting day after day for twelve days. Throw in a day's break here and there, some fun and frolic, and evenings of Ultimate Frisbee and walks. Now, add to this imagining all possible questions that come to your mind about running a small school. Imagine these twenty people talking through all these questions that you just added. Remove feelings of hierarchy of organisational status amongst individuals, add versatility of skills, remove diplomacy of posture, add a good amount of curiosity and commitment. Lo and behold! You have just gotten a decent picture of the curriculum meetings at CFL.

Curriculum meetings tend to be one of the most intense spaces of working together at CFL. Every year, the teachers meet in April, soon after we finish the academic year and the student report meetings. These almost-full-day meetings over 12 days are arguably the most important decision making space for the year to come.

Except for cooking our own meals, everything about these meetings is planned and executed by teachers. We take turns to organise these meetings, we generate questions that need discussion, we talk these over, and we are responsible for carrying through the decisions that arise out of these discussions. This automatically places an enormous sense of ownership and responsibility on each teacher.

Most of what is talked about and reflected upon in these sessions can be broadly categorised into four areas: *philosophical moorings* that form the basis of our daily work, *relational issues* that emerge in working together so closely, *educational ideas* for different age groups/students, and of course, *administrative aspects* which include finance, infrastructure and so on. So these meetings for us are never merely about syllabi and classroom planning, but a continual engagement and re-imagining of the overall educational intentions, and working out how they might play out for the community over a particular academic year.

The meetings themselves are exciting to look forward to. Learning objectives, classroom ideas, special *mela* programs, philosophical arguments, fund raising plans, all find their place in these discussions. Many of these are kept alive through the year in the teachers' Friday meetings too. Curriculum meetings are a meaningful, creative space that allow for something greater than the sum of individual ideas to emerge. They are informal and flexible in structure, all-consuming in intention and insightful in consideration.

Having said this, curriculum meetings are not always easy. These sessions can also easily become exhausting,

daunting and emotional at times, as what comes to the fore is not just one's own interest and commitment but also one's entrenched position: of inflexible ideology and personal habits of processing the world. And when these psychological movements are challenged by a group of colleagues, it can surely lead to either change or sorrow! We conduct these meetings fully realising that the content of these discussions have the potential to get coloured by the illusory, rational-seeming, cohesive self-hood of an individual teacher, and that one needs repeated reminding that our personal thoughts and feelings are not exactly truth-seekers or truth-tellers about the nature of the universe.

Regardless of the demands that these meetings pose, it has become obvious that a vibrant, reflective learning space cannot be created easily. Members of such a community, teachers first, need to come together often enough, talk for long enough, be open-minded enough to make effective-enough decisions. This we are clear about. And even if endless meetings leave us feeling like *curry kolambu* ourselves, we are fully willing and sincerely given to it.





Flying discs

A vague memory of flinging a frisbee on a rainy day resurfaces. It was about four years ago when a few of us began to pass a disc around and practice throws. These were rough, hardly accurate and not always caught by others, leading to frustration! In those days, we were passing time and no one knew that a game like Ultimate Frisbee existed. But there was something about seeing a disc fly into the air gracefully. “To see an object fly through space so effortlessly is a thing of beauty”, I recall a colleague saying.

We were lucky that an alumnus was part of the Indian international frisbee team, and she happened to visit CFL to talk about the sport with us. There were several characteristics of this sport that we were drawn to: it is self-refereed; the ‘spirit’ of play is more important than winning (encouraged by the ‘Spirit Award’ that is given to the team displaying the best attitude); there are mixed-gender teams at all levels. We began that very day, with our alumnus Maitreyi Ananth out on the field demonstrating and training us on the basics. The sport has taken root in our junior, middle and senior school sports programs, and during other free times: a frisbee is always at hand in a central area and can be used for solo throw practice, with just one other friend, or with a whole group.

The size of a field is 110 metres by 37 metres, but of course, this can be adjusted depending on the space that one has for play! There are two teams of seven players each. Parallel to each of the shorter sides of the field, a line is marked

which indicates the two opposite end-zones. This is similar to a goal marking in football. A team needs to catch the frisbee inside its end-zone to score a point. The game requires continuous start-stop movements, agility, location planning and strategising, as well as flexibility and skill in throwing. Throws include the backhand, the forehand and the hammer, amongst others, each one requiring a certain precision in direction, orientation and speed.

In the spirit of sports at CFL, we discourage aggression on the field, favouring participation (whatever the ability level), an attitude of inclusiveness and encouraging each other, fair play and appreciating the opposing team’s skills and points as well as that of our own. Can we gain competency without having to compete? Can we enjoy a game without bothering about who is losing or winning? Can we appreciate the art of sport no matter which side the player is on?

We have seen that Ultimate Frisbee has no bars to gender, height, strength or age. When school is in session, mixed teams ranging in age from 10 to 18 years of age may start an impromptu game. On weekends, the campus sees children as young as 8 years playing alongside adults as young as 50! A person of minimal skill can participate, while mastery is quite something else. One can play for years and still improve on one’s passing, catching and strategising!

Visit CFL, and there’s a good chance that someone will be throwing a disc around. Don’t hesitate – just join in!



That's the way the cookie crumbles

When we live on a residential campus, we all quickly realise how close food is to our hearts and what an emotional issue it is. A lot of our daily life goes towards foraging for and thinking about food in different ways (and of course consuming it as well!) We create powerful cultures around food in the spaces where we live and work.

When we are asked by visitors, "What is your curriculum?", we often reply by saying that all aspects of daily life, from studying to working on the land to exercise, form a part of our curriculum. Food is certainly a part of our curriculum: its preparation, consumption and the values and ideas that lie behind it. I will try to describe in this article our overall approach to food as well as the challenges we face in educating the young (and ourselves) about this complex issue!

In the past few years of discussing with students and adults on campus, it appears that we all have varying ideas of food, even though we all contribute to making the CFL food culture together. Personal cultures of food may differ significantly in the community as well as in the homes students come from. Diversity in thinking about food is essential, and we appreciate the positives that emerge from this diversity, such as the variety of menus that we can offer. In the midst of this diversity, it is also essential to have a common core

set of ideas around which a community kitchen can operate, which I will talk about over the course of this article.

The food we serve in the school kitchen is of a simple, 'everyday' kind. What is served is dependent on:

- our ideas of a balanced diet in a child's week
- the availability and perishability of ingredients
- the participation of various community members including parents, students and teachers
- Taste, variety, fun, treats and sweets

In school, the 'everyday' would include energy-rich and growth-related food such as carbohydrates, protein and fat to support our daily demands of energy in the classroom, playfield and on walks. 'Everyday' also means vegetables, both in cooked and raw forms, and fruit to provide the vitamins, minerals and fibre that are essential. We also serve yoghurt at every meal to provide calcium to the children. Rice and millets are served everyday, not just because they are the mainstay of south Indian food, but also because they are relatively easy to cook; the dishes that accompany the rice are actually very varied. Wheat-based dishes are very much part of our menu, but both bread and *chapattis* require more time and people to prepare for the whole community. 'Everyday' food at school also includes pasta, noodles, baked



dishes, *pani puri*, chocolate cake, the occasional sweet and fried dishes such as *puri* or *pakoda*. We do not use imported or expensive ingredients on a regular basis. We do prioritize organic ingredients and local and seasonal produce wherever possible. Organic red rice (which we introduced despite a lot of resistance from everyone, children and adults alike), is now an inseparable part of our daily lives. (You may be surprised to know that there are quite a few former students who remember red rice rather fondly!) We also use organic millets, organic *tur dal*, organic milk thrice a week, organic turmeric, jaggery and mustard and free-range eggs. We have supported a local women's group who make and sell *papads*. Vegetables and greens bought in Magadi, the closest town, are locally grown except for onions, potatoes and beetroot. We have consciously avoided cabbage and cauliflower over the last few years considering the amount of pesticide used in growing them. In a good year, our garden produces a significant amount of pesticide-free vegetables and greens. For example, last year we produced over a thousand kilos of vegetables, and we get our yearly supply of tamarind from our own trees.

We are also lucky that so many people cook in our kitchen; the diversity in thought and creation of the meal is enhanced! We get to taste the varied, interesting side dishes that people make to go with rice, experimenting with cui-

sines from all across India. Despite several limiting factors, ranging from eight-hour power cuts to the vegetables available being predominantly gourds (we try to eat locally grown vegetables as far as possible), it's actually quite amazing what a spread of dishes we get to eat!

The thinking behind the kitchen is constantly evolving in response to the needs and wants of the community. This is a really important aspect to keeping a sense of participation alive. For instance, in response to feedback from students, we have tinkered with snack timings as well as the nature of the snack itself, keeping in mind the gaps between the main meals and the hunger factor during games. The shift towards organic food was another conscious change. To feel the pulse of the community and respond to it is an important aspect of running the CFL kitchen.

I would like to share some of what we observe at school about the relationship that young people seem to have with food. Of course we would like to keep in mind that not all students have the same feeling and also adults are also not terribly different!

There are many positives to take away when we think about food from an educational context at CFL. Students contribute significantly to running and maintaining the kitchen. Almost all weekday breakfasts have been so far prepared by students with help from kitchen staff. They are involved in

cutting, cleaning and most of the cooking. On school excursions, students are cooperative when it comes to food. They don't make a fuss and are very appreciative of the effort that our hosts put in. The students are often exposed to foods from a variety of cultures, which they are open to taste and enjoy.

However, there are also some significant challenges when we think about the food cultures of the young; we don't know if these are peculiar to our socio-cultural background. There is an obsession about certain kinds of food: the 'exotic' variety, sweets and processed food such as pizzas, burgers and chips. This obsession expresses itself in many ways! Either on trips or in school, when children are not occupied, they are often talking about food that they have eaten or are going to eat. This preoccupation has led to their bringing food to school beyond what they themselves have agreed to, and to hoarding, taking food from others and planning midnight parties! There is a lot of planning around food: how to procure it and how to maintain secrecy. Food is a major source of bonding and socializing, which inevitably leads to the inclusion of some and exclusion of others.

Some students genuinely appreciate and like school food, but there are many who struggle. A few openly express their displeasure and seem oblivious to the fact that a great deal of energy and effort has gone into the preparation of the meal! Older students may eat very little, far below their nutritional need. Across age groups, there is wastage and also there is the use of food as a bargaining tool ("I will wash your plate if you eat my *baingan*!") From an early age, we are beginning to see eating habits forming which could be a cause for concern, for example, eating large amounts of sugar at various

time of the day, a need for salty food and a dependence on caffeine. Perhaps food has become an escape from boredom, something to be identified with and a way of judging others. There is even a 'snob value' associated with consuming certain kinds of food! We do understand that this is not unique to our children and when we share notes with other schools, we see that we are not significantly different.

It is very clear that food is a major sign of our conditioning. Many of us struggle with poor eating habits, and we often depend on food to escape restlessness. For many of us it is a lifelong struggle to have a healthy relationship to food and we also have health issues directly connected to our eating patterns.

We should, by sensitive conversation and reflection, be able to question our likes and dislikes and see them in a wider global context of food production and consumption. In a non-moralistic and non-judgemental way, we also try to talk about issues such as pleasure-seeking, dependence on stimulation, and the excitement that social bonding over food and entertainment create. Bringing these questions to the young is very challenging, given the immediacy of and visceral feelings around the issue, but it can be done. The first step, as always, is to understand the depths of our own conditioning in this realm and not to pretend to be above the issue ourselves. Further, we aim to sustain healthy eating cultures that children can participate in, appreciate and enjoy. This last will inevitably be a slow process and will demand a lot of energy from parents and teachers alike. If we can keep the conversation open and our own minds open as well, we can hope for creative and positive outcomes in this most emotional of realms!





Comings and goings

K Srinivasan, our physics teacher, in-house badminton champion and dexterous soccer goalie, has left CFL after almost 18 years of working here. His presence is missed and we wish Srini all the very best in the future. Jayamma, who has worked here for more than a decade, has also left the school. We thank her for her hard work and jovial presence.

We are happy to welcome Usha Krishnamoorthy and Gururaj Choudhari to CFL this year. They will be working with different age groups on maths and sciences, as well as dabbling in fitness and sports, helping in the kitchen and in administrative areas. Munesh has also joined the CFL community, working as part of the support staff team. He replaces Chandan whom we bid farewell to earlier this year, and Lala who worked briefly with us before having to leave. We are happy to also welcome our youngest member to the community, Sameeran, son of Sruti and Sandilya, teachers of CFL. He provides many a delightful moment to everyone. Sasha and Athena have also joined us this year. These two Mudhol hounds joined us as puppies about one year ago, have grown up here under the care and affection of many students, and have become part of the scenery.

The year saw many old friends and new, visiting, staying, returning, which brought a vibrancy to the campus.

Jen, Jon and their daughter Awynn visited for a month. They immediately became involved in various land and craft activities, such as weaving mats with the fifth grade students. A runner friend, Arvind, came to CFL weekly for much of the first term to inspire and train us all to run,

jog, slow jog and so on. The results speak for themselves as people who never would have run earlier continued to run throughout the year, and, our usual runners pushed themselves further.

We learned immensely from friends who shared their work and areas of expertise. Shreyas Sreenath shared his research on the caste system as it plays out in solid waste management work in Bengaluru. He spoke with students from 9th standard upwards. Sudhira of Gubbi Labs gave a senior group an overview on the state of villages vis-a-vis government schemes, as well as speaking to the 9th standard group about Bengaluru city's public transport and the many agencies that are involved in the management of water and sanitation at different levels. P Sridhar of Namma Bengaluru spoke with a senior group on the Master Plan for Bengaluru. Shreekanth Deodhar spoke with the senior biology students on his work on the behaviour of lizards and Mahua Ghara discussed her work on the biology of fig wasps while taking students on a nature walk. Sowmya Raj from Payana, an activist from the transgender community, addressed our senior students on the issues faced by her community. Shashank Kumar of the Azim Premji University held a session with senior students as part of a course on modern India. Kannada author Vasudhendra, author of the recent novel, Mohanaswamy, spoke to several senior groups about his writing in Kannada and his journey as a writer. Professor M R N Murthy, a professor of molecular biophysics at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, spoke to our senior students about the relationship between science, mathematics and art.

Sheba Desors from Kalpavriksh, Pune and Anjora from Goa had sessions with students around food, culture and stories. Lousie Wheatley, a medieval historian from the UK engaged students of 9th and 10th standards, sharing ideas on what actually constitutes historical research in her field.

We regularly have visits from and enriching conversations with educators who come to share their work and experience and learn from what is happening here. This year, for example, Amrita and Sangeetha from Apni Shaala in Mumbai spent some time with us.

Old friends Andrew, Maggie and Derek from Brockwood Park School in the UK visited and spent time. Andrew and Maggie interacted with some senior students with a discussion on broader issues in education. Derek as always delighted us with his storytelling and all around good humour, this time using a Hang Drum as part of his routine. Alan from Wales shared his enthusiasm for bird watching with a few groups of students of different ages. Kara from England, an old young friend who has worked with children in the UK, Spain and Central America spent time with us.

A highlight in July this year was when professionals came to 'shoot' in the CFL Library. The Parag Initiative of Tata Trusts which promotes reading and children's literature requested if they could film the 'open library' and book-related activities at CFL.

Preetam Koilpillai and a team of camera and lighting crew spent two days filming in the library. Children of different age groups, from 5th standard to seniors were filmed browsing among bookshelves, listening to read-alouds, doing a treasure hunt, giving book-talks and discussing books. This footage of children in the library, interspersed with interviews with adults, has been woven by Preetam into an exposure film for library-educators across the country.

A *Yakshagana* troupe, Tarakita Kala Kammata from Dakshina Kannada, convened by former parent, Vani Periodi, gave an enthralling performance. Neighbouring villages were invited for the evening. *Yakshagana* takes stories mainly from the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita, and this particular performance was the story of Lord Vishnu's weapon, the *Sudarshan Chakra*.

Of course we were thrilled to have Gerard Bayle back with us again this year. This octogenarian theater artist from France spends a few weeks annually with CFL contributing invaluable to various plays across different ages, and is a primary force behind the annual senior play.

Sindhu Radhakrishna, our local slender loris expert, continued her study for part of the year and Anindya Chaudhuri, her student, completed his study and left early on in the year.

A group of young social entrepreneurs from around Karnataka, supported by the organisation Dhvani, met for

five days at CFL in mid-May. This was one of their training sessions, and it was held in the new assembly hall. Their sessions were lively, covering topics in governance. The participants enjoyed the quiet, the simple accommodation, the lushness of campus in May, the daily 4pm thundershowers, and the thick curd that comes direct from the village cows!

The entire school had the pleasure of dining in moonlight during the lunar eclipse in January. It was a celestial way to spend an evening.

We want to sincerely thank alumni, as well as current and former parents of the school who have extended themselves in ever so many ways—in the kitchen, in our senior general studies programme and in fundraising—to support the school over this past year.

Last but not at all least, we sadly bid farewell to one of our dogs, Cookie, who died earlier this year.





A space to gather

On a hot windy afternoon in April 2016, we lost our assembly hall thatch roof to a fire. A few days after the fire, we walked amid the desolate ruins, so to speak. Strangely it is the incongruous survivors that evoke waves of sentiment: the mark of the old switchboard with wires extruding from it, the ghosts of painted constellations from the astronomy mela, the rubber mat from the front, the grill of the inner room windows. After years of being manhandled by CFL students, the Bhavana song books have become incredibly resilient and did not burn. Many of us (and some of you) probably went through a rush of memories of events under that life-supporting thatch when you heard the news. Singing in the mornings (or yawning, as the case may be); sounds of busy mice, squirrels and lizards from deep within the thick grass of the roof; endlessly cleaning bat scat from the floor; unforgettable lines delivered from plays and presentations in Kannada, Hindi and English; Sunday conversations with parents; conferences and seminars held by other groups; farewells for graduating students; dancing pata-pata all over the cool green *bethamchella* tile floor.

Reconstruction and restoration work began soon in earnest. Thanks to the generous support of the extended CFL community (former students and parents and current parents) and funds from our corpus we have been able to rebuild our assembly hall. We would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all the donors and well wishers who have given generously to CFL, so that our work in education can continue. Special thanks are also due to Georg Leuzinger and his team of architects for creating a beautiful space with amazing acoustics that can now hold nearly 400 people. Of course the construction would not have happened without the hard work of several individuals, all of whom we are deeply grateful to.



We had a gala inauguration on January 20th 2018 with a scintillating Hindustani vocal concert by Smt Bharathi Prathap accompanied by Sri Vyasmurti Katti on the harmonium and Sri Gurumurthy Vaidya on the tabla. It was a memorable evening and a beautiful initiation of our reconstructed assembly hall. We would like to thank them for so readily agreeing to perform at CFL.

As soon as the assembly hall was inaugurated it was back in action! Apart from resuming our regular assemblies and monthly parents' meetings and retreats, the assembly hall also witnessed a range of musical, literary and other artistic talent during our Open Mic night, when parents, teachers, guests, former and current students provided four hours of in-house entertainment.

It seemed an overall dramatic year with plays galore, especially in Term 3, in the new assembly hall. We welcomed the opportunity to invite the Bangalore Little Theatre company to put up their well-known play, *The Prophet and the Poet*. From the youngest to the oldest children, everyone was involved in either English, Hindi or Kannada plays, math-based plays or Greek tragedies! A dramatic rendition of the Buddha's life in Hindi by our 8th standard students, as scripted by our former teacher, the late Leela Garady enthralled and educated us. The annual senior production this year was J B Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, a spine-tingling, rich and gripping tale of an inspector's inquiry into an aristocratic British family at the turn of the 20th Century. Twist after twist in this social commentary met the appreciative audience. Though written almost eighty years ago, the issues it raised are still relevant today. As always, our dear friend Gerard Bayle gave his dramatic advice and support to many of these plays, even though he was not present at school to see the final outcome. Children (and teachers) of all ages enjoyed their engagement with Gerard.



Friends of CFL: a fund-raising appeal

Last year we re-introduced our micro-charity fund-raising idea, the “Friends of CFL” programme, to our readers. We were very successful in this effort and we managed to meet our target of Rs 15 lakhs. We are sincerely grateful to each and every individual who supported us.

To explain for our new readers, CFL has consciously chosen to work with a ‘deficit budget’. That is, there is a gap between the annual running costs of the school and the annual contribution from parents. Each year we offer unlimited and uncapped scholarships to any of our families who request them. This is to make CFL accessible to any parent who is serious about a different kind of education and wishes to join us in our philosophical exploration. This scholarship model has worked well all these years.

We have two sources to cover the deficit: the income from our corpus (endowment fund) and the generous donations we receive each year from well wishers and friends. So far we have managed to meet our deficits each year quite successfully, thanks to the considerable time and energy spent by several individuals in the community (parents, alumni and teachers) towards raising funds.

For the year 2018-19, we again anticipate that we need to raise a sum of Rs 15 lakhs (approx US \$ 22,500). If we have 300 “Friends of CFL” each donating a sum of Rs 5,000 (US \$ 75), we can easily cover our deficit for the year.

If you are interested in joining the “Friends of CFL” programme, please do contact us by sending an email to the address below with “Friends of CFL” in the subject box.

Donor information: Centre For Learning is a registered charitable society. Donations to the society are exempt from Income Tax to the extent provided for under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961. If you wish to avail tax exemption in the USA, please email us for details. For more information, please visit <https://cfl.in/support-us/how-can-i-help-cfl/>

We are trying to correct spelling and other errors in our mailing list. Could you drop us an email at info@cfl.in to point out any mistakes in your mailing label?

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