

What CFL is not

Hello everyone. I am Rupa and I work at Centre For Learning. I will now share with you some details to clarify what CFL is not. There may likely be assumptions about the way CFL works and this is therefore an attempt to examine and explain where we come from and our thinking.

To begin with, CFL is not a school where your child receives individual attention and I'll explain what we mean when we say this - We have at CFL consciously decided to keep the number of children low, we are a small community. This decision stems from the feeling that what we are attempting to do (and you may have heard this from other presentations) can happen only in small groups and not in large numbers. Building relationships and being in touch with the children, exploring together what it means to live sensitively and intelligently needs regular and close contact, which large numbers disallow. When we say "we have small numbers", it may be sometimes understood as 'my child gets individual attention'. The answer to this is both 'yes and no'. 'Yes' because we are concerned about every child's well-being and this forms a strong foothold in our relating with children. And 'no' because we'd like to stare hard at the role of self-centredness in each of our lives and be skeptical about the feeling of individuality that pervades daily life. In other words, whether child or adult, we'd like to question the 'uniqueness' we feel about ourselves. Small number of children in each class can be easily understood as '*academically my child will receive the best and his/her strengths will be harnessed, weak areas will be identified and worked on...*', and so on. This is certainly not the simplistic way in which we approach learning. There is a much broader understanding of what learning means as other presentations may have informed you and this informs our daily work too. Of course, we do take seriously the process of teaching itself and make sure that we are in touch with children with regard to what is taught.

An observation that furthers this question about 'individual attention' is that we all possess the same characteristics of the human mind and there is still sameness in the way we meet life - making images of people in our lives, carrying strong ideas about oneself, wanting to be acknowledged, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain and so on. Considering this, we are skeptical about the feeling of being unique which then defines individual personalities. So CFL is not a school with small numbers so as to nurture a feeling of being special or unique in the way it is generally understood.

This school has many features that are appealing to parents – no exams till the child reaches class 10, friendly atmosphere, many ‘extra-curricular’ activities, natural surroundings etc. It seems like a safe and rich environment for a child to grow in. This is absolutely necessary for the well-being of children. However, we hope that this kind of education will make the children seriously challenge society as it currently exists. We would like to caution that the school cannot be a safe route for your child to fit into society as it exists today. This cannot be a stepping stone for aspirations and ambitions parents have. These are the very same ambitions that are creating conflicts in the world. We find that what children have here is valuable in itself and we don’t see it as a path to a promising career and hope that parents are fully aware of this.

If your child has a special talent or skill and many may have, our approach will not be geared towards drawing attention to the particular child to focus entirely on this talent. This does not mean we dismiss or don’t acknowledge abilities that children may have. Our energies go into asking questions of how we think about ourselves, our preoccupation with what others think about us, the desire for fulfillment and a sense of achievement. Therefore, being alert to the psychological movements that garners a strong image of oneself and what this does to us is what we explore along with children.

CFL is not a school where freedom implies choice. Yes, this is an open and free environment. This does not however mean children exercise their choice in various matters related to their participation in the learning process. So, for example, we do not believe that a child must intrinsically feel like engaging in a particular activity and must therefore be entitled to choose if he or she participates. Rather, we feel the need to ask why one resists the structure/activity. What is this resistance we all notice in ourselves? Speaking of choice, living in a community means we learn how to be sensitive to the needs of the place and people. Freedom then cannot mean ‘*I do as I please*’! We hope to help children see consequences of actions and act out of an understanding of what it means to live and work together. We do not see ourselves as service providers to a particular set of people in society. What I mean is that this is not a business transaction between parents and teachers. We’d like to reiterate that parents and teachers are working together, interested in questions that come up in our daily lives and are also bringing up children in the process and educating them. This

will be the basis of our relationship as we engage with each other for many years to come.

Thank you.