

*Abstract: Schools and teaching as the world knows them evolved in cultures, ancient and more recent. Knowledge and useful skills were the basis for much learning, along with the qualities that were considered good for a human being to have. In our time we are seeing an extraordinary pace of change and innovation. An upheaval, and an opening out, are radically transforming the way we live, interact and function as individuals in society. Institutions and schools would need to make sense of this to chart a way ahead. There is no school that prepares teachers or students with guidance and direction setting for evolving roles in a world that is in serial transition. Nevertheless, schools need to have a direction wider than alignment with technology, and waiting for a clearing to emerge from the pandemic and other inevitable climate disasters. Schools have an opportunity to be part of the unfolding learning opportunities with their choices and work as models. In my talk and paper I will share the choices made in a small residential school (5-12) that started in 2010 under the aegis of Krishnamurti Foundation India and its discoveries and challenges with regard to role of students, teachers and the journey of learning.*

## **PREAMBLE**

I thank the Taiwan Experimental Education Centre for inviting me to this special location. It would have given me greater pleasure if I could have been in the same physical space as the people present here today. Unfortunately, due to the time and circumstances it has not been possible for me to travel. However, it is also due to the time and circumstances that I am able to be part of this conference!

## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's talk, I will speak about some aspects of teacher education in the present context with reference a 3-month teacher training programme for new teachers that I initiated and my experience of setting up a new school with pointers for teacher learning and education.

To teach in school in India one needs a Degree and a Teaching Certificate. This is the direction of organised society where everything needs to be certified. The teaching programme is content-heavy and exposes the teacher trainee to a wide range of educational philosophies, approaches and strategies relevant to subjects. After a year of this exposure, trainees go for teaching experience to schools. Invariably, the experience of teaching in school is very different from whatever they anticipated. Student-friendly educational practices struggle to coexist with the pressure for exam results. It is as if a live classroom, with its turbulences, doesn't allow for good learning and meaningful exchanges. For teachers entering the field, how much of learning in the context of the school is necessary and how much of learning in the context away from school is good and desirable?

I started my life in school after migrating from an engineering and research background to a functioning Krishnamurti school in Chennai in 1990. I was appointed as the head of the school and therefore, concerned with teacher recruitment, teacher induction and keeping the direction of The School in tune with the teachings of J.Krishnamurti. It was due to very pragmatic reasons that I got interested in teacher education, initially. This happened because the school moved in the direction of multi-age classrooms from grade 1 to grade 7. This has been presented in a separate paper<sup>1</sup>. This change was brought about after a proposal I made to colleagues and the school board. A pilot project, with the full enthusiasm and support of all teachers, was initiated. Once the move was made a problem presented itself.

New teachers come with their experience of school as students and later as teachers in school. Both these experiences are based on age-wise segregated environments. Unless a teacher who applied to us had been working in Montessori school, there was no chance of the teacher having any exposure to a multi-age environment. Training was therefore a necessity. If we did not have a way of inducting and quickly training teachers, school would never be able to sustain the direction of multi-age classrooms. Once this problem has recognised, we had to find a way in which new teachers could be oriented, and this needed to be done before school started. When the school year began in June, the new teacher would have to step in reasonably well-oriented.

While the Teacher Training programme found its starting point in a shift of pedagogy in one school, the approaches followed may be relevant in any school focussed on building a culture on learning.

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<sup>1</sup> *Inclusion in School Education in the Indian Context - Transition to Mixed Age environment in grades 5,6,&7 at The School & ALM in TN Govt Upper Primary schools. IIT Madras Feb 2016*

**3 - MONTH TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME IN A RUNNING SCHOOL**

We began a short three-month programme , which ran from January to March, for trainee teachers. We evolved it from scratch. There were many challenges as we could not set up a teacher training department or dedicate a person for the purpose.

We tapped into our strengths - a large number of teachers who had spent more than a decade in school - and used this to create a low-input teacher training program. The overarching question was “What do we need to do so that the new teacher is 80% ready for the school year in June?”. Some of the elements of this programme were -

- each trainee, as an adult, could take initiative and responsibility for their decisions. In effect, therefore, each trainee created their own learning programme . This meant that the trainee was expected to be self-directed and give evidence of agency.
- each trainee was asked what questions they would like to answer and how - through reading, attending classes, discussion, reflection and recording. These questions were incorporated into a planning table (given below), and became the template for their journey of learning.
- each trainee had a mentor with whom they met for an hour each week.
- the week was scheduled as observation sessions at assemblies
- Each trainee was required to anchor classes under observation.

Before starting the programme all potential mentors, teachers with over 10 years in school, had a discussion on ‘If I had a trainee to mentor’. The mentors said they would -

1. **ask the school to decide the allocation for the trainee at this stage.**
2. have a meeting with the trainee & communicate where we wish to see them at the end of 12 weeks.
3. ask what the trainee would like to learn in the next 3 months and help the trainee make a full list.

**Planning table for trainees**

| w<br>k | Thing to be learnt | modality | Questions I would like to answer theoretically | By date | Questions I would like to answer practically | By date | support sought by trainee | support suggested for trainee |
|--------|--------------------|----------|--|---------|--|---------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 2      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 3      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 4      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 5      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 6      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 7      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 8      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 9      |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 10     |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 11     |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |
| 12     |                    |          |  |         |  |         |                           |                               |

This table became the guiding chart for the trainee and the mentor, which could be modified after 2 or 3 weeks.

The school also had some requirements which needed to be fulfilled. The new teacher needed to understand what the philosophy was, a little of the school’s history and school norms. In addition the new teacher would need to feel empowered to act when common problems were seen. (Table below)

| Topics                      | Resources  | Date | qns school wd like Trainee to answer theoretically | qns school wd like Trainee to answer practically | support asked for | support suggested |
|-----------------------------|--|------|--|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| J.Krishnamurti on education | books, video, handbook etc   |      | ✓  |  |                   |                   |
| school history              | Articles - conversations   |      | ✓  |  |                   |                   |
| school norms                | Teachers manual and website  |      | ✓  |  |                   |                   |
| what to do if....           | Conversations with teachers and research of common situations in school classrooms |      |  | ✓  |                   |                   |

G.Gautama 25 Nov 2006

With that began our **distributed-resource teacher-training programme** where older teachers were required to learn the art of mentoring younger teachers, and the principal had to learn how to mentor senior colleagues. It was a wonderful and challenging experience.

School was not just about academics and classes. Trainees would need to understand qualities in the atmosphere, and all those elements that support the learning experience of young learners. In addition to observing assemblies and special programme s trainees would eat with staff and students in the dining hall, where one could grow aware of the multiple exchanges that simultaneously take place daily. The programme offered immersion in the school atmosphere to understand the many elements that went into creating a school.

During this period the trainee observed the running of the multi-age classes. After observing classes 4 or 6 weeks they were asked to prepare lesson plans in consultation with the teacher whose classes they were observing. They would take this class and receive feedback from the senior teacher. It was required that after that they would have to prepare another lesson plan taking into account the feedback that they received and take the next class. By the time the training period ended each trainee would've taken about 8 to 10 classes, each one of them with a clear lesson plan and guidance from a senior teacher. The trainee had to learn to allow room for initiative and responsibility from the young learners, rather than lecture the students,. The teacher’s role was that of a facilitator, enabler, one who supported inquiry and learning of the young, in visible and in invisible ways.

Trainees were expected to maintain a daily journal. This also meant that they would be seeking meetings with senior teachers and their mentors. Some books were recommended for their reading. When they finished reading a book they would write a review as well. A full document was prepared by each trainee - a detailed account of the traineeship, of how they pursued the questions they had, and what they discovered. This portfolio was the visible outcome of the training programme, that would also be a self-assessment.

This was not a certified programme from any university or board. But a certificate was issued to each person from the school at the end of the training period. This was a hugely successful attempt and within a short few years 40 to 50% of the school’s teaching staff had come through this training programme. Many teachers who had joined school before the training programme wanted to join as well!

**HISTORICAL REFLECTION**

In an ancient civilisation like India, there were approaches to school education, that were very different in the past and that served the Indian subcontinent well in its quest for education and economic viability. The British occupation for over 400 years reduced a flourishing Indian sub-continent to a struggling poor nation - a nation that contributed 27% of global GDP was reduced to 1-2% in 200 years.

*I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the*

*soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished. The village schools were not good enough for the British administrator, so he came out with his programme . Every school must have so much paraphernalia, building, and so forth.*

*(MK Gandhi at Chatham House, London Oct 20, 1931)*

One may wonder, what kind of education took place in India before the British rule that allowed India to be so successful economically, academically, and in every sphere including art, music and dance? What kind of training did the teachers receive before they began their practice? How did the hundred thousand schools of Madras Presidency and Calcutta Presidency manage the requirements of the pupils and the teachers? At the macro level the learning and work of the population created flourishing economic activity.

Learning in context vs learning in the classroom has always been debated. Learning and work seem to have gone hand in hand for the viable citizen in earlier times. In a rapidly changing environment, do we need to revise this question again?

It became obvious during the last two years of lockdown and online classes and online communication, that we do not need the paraphernalia of school buildings, libraries, play fields when it comes to just information and knowledge and even learning many skills. Technological advancements today allow for meaningful interactions over distances. We can instantly see the value of sending a short text, voice or video message over vast distances and also the use of emails and video conferencing. This saves us energy and a lot of time. It is no longer required to walk to meet a friend unless one wants to... It throws into question how much learning happens within the physical setting of a school and how much can happen outside school using digital tools. This applies as much to adults - the teachers, and the young learners.

Therefore, how do we see the role of the teacher, in a world which is intensely competing for our attention? As we attempt to address this question we can see that there are many other questions that follow behind this one.

1. What is the meaning of education in a technologically cross-connected world, with information at one's fingertips? Is teaching, or enabling learning, a journey of the heart or is it a mere intermediary step to helping the young fit into the existing world?
2. What is the meaning of the word 'learning' in such a context? How significant is knowledge in the world where it doubles every 2 1/2 years?
3. In a world where we are required to be lifelong learners what is the context that the school must provide for the young learners as well as the teacher learners? With AI bringing in dramatic changes, how is one to orient oneself as a learning teacher?

It is in attempting to address these questions, or rather living with these questions, that institutions and individuals enter a zone of multiple transitions. Teacher training is an activity for sustaining institutions. When we do teacher training, is it merely for the trainee to repeat what has already been done for a hundred years? Or do institutions wish to invite teachers into a journey of change and initiative and new attempts? Should the narratives of change also form a part of the teacher training processes? How is the intelligence in each human being to be awakened?

#### **PATHASHAALA A YOUNG SCHOOL STARTED 2010** <sup>2</sup>

In the year 2000 I had stumbled upon some insights - that school education can happen around a new curriculum, not of reality divided into specialized subjects but, around differently organized learning, learning around eternal issues which contained the various subjects. Healthy safe living, resourcefulness, accessing information, right thinking and decision making, working together and understanding feelings seem to be at the heart of human well being while also being needed for work. I have included this document as an Appendix to this paper.

Due to a strange set of circumstances I was given the work of starting of a new school under the umbrella of Krishnamurti Foundation India. in a large campus about 80 km from Chennai, a city of about 10 million. The work involved laying out the campus, defining the architecture, pedagogy and seeing the the school was environmentally, socially and financially viable. Krishnamurti had farsightedly said that "Each school must work out its own approach". Not only was this revelatory, it provided a

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<sup>2</sup> <https://pcf-kfi.org/pathashaala/>

rationale to attempt something different. A new Krishnamurti school was not a matter of replication; the move ahead had to be a renewal.

Pathashaala is a young school which started in 2010. On a large campus, a small school, designed for 120 students and about 30 teachers, was set up in such a way that learning was needed for all who came to study and teach. Here are some features of this small and young school, a school for learners, which seem worth sharing. I will share a few visuals with you so you get a sense of the physical setting and then go on to connecting to the theme of this talk.



**CONTEXT**

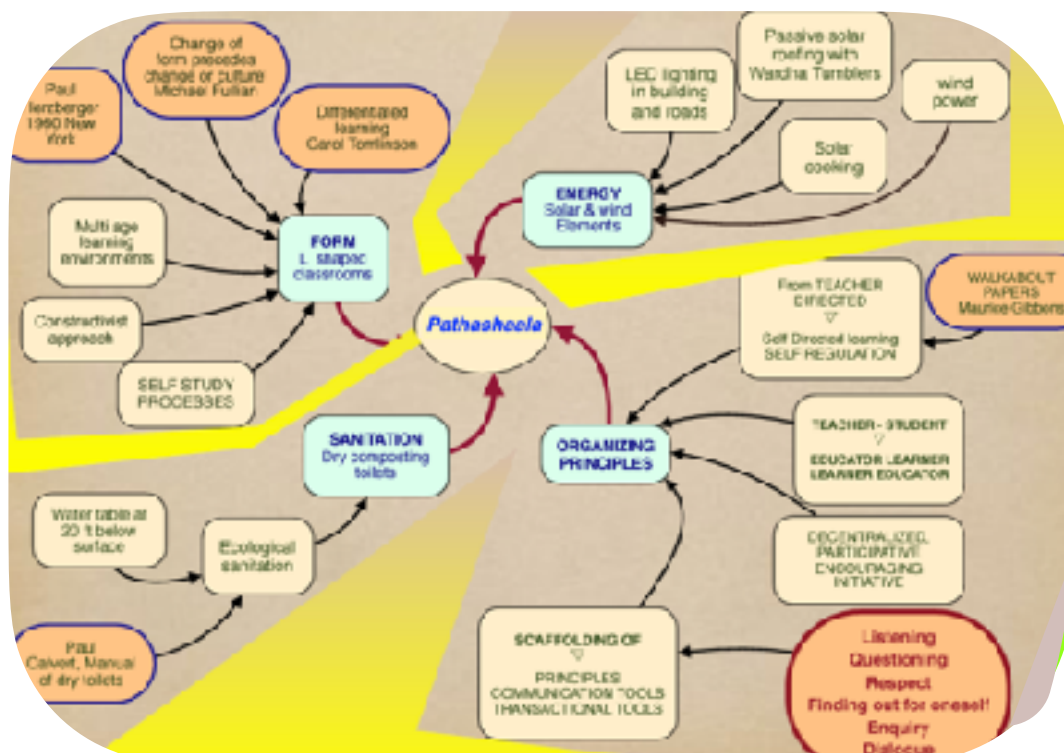
After much research Pathashaala was conceived around the Dunbar's number, 150 residents in all. About 120 students and 25 teachers. The small numbers offered significant opportunities for shifted processes:

- Students defined as **Learner-Educators** and teachers as **Educator - Learners**. All are learners and contributing to the learning of others.
- **Sharing daily tasks in the dorms, dining hall and classrooms** with a rotational approach.
- **randomisation** for encouraging engagement among members. This approach widens the number of people with whom one engages with in a day. Engagement builds relationships and resilience.

- Classes conceived as **multi-age settings**. While there are some disadvantages of such a choice, it draws "teacher of the subject" towards being a "teacher of life and living".
- **Conversations** in small and large groups provide contexts for airing one's thoughts and arguments and also listening to others. Learning to listen and participate is important.

**PRINCIPLES**

How does school work towards life-long learning as integral part of school life for students and teachers? How does a school make choices regarding energy, sanitation and form that support such a direction.





Pathashaala has weekly sessions for all Educator-Learners to meet for 1 - 1.5 hours of **Educator-Learners Learning Sessions (ELLS)**. This time can be shaped by Educator-Learners for structure and content. Each session has a theme, some reading or uses a google form for triggering discussion. The session can be online or in person. There are small group conversations that make us think of the various situations encountered in school and also invite us to listen to multiple experiences. The session ends with a large group session for about 20 mins where there is an open sharing as well as someone attempting to draw threads together. The conversations are not concluded, as they are part of ongoing conversations. The outcomes may be intended learning and of immediate relevance. However, it is understood that there may be learning that may not be verbalised or directly of immediate relevance.

If the teacher has to create that 'strange atmosphere where learning can happen' (J.Krishnamurti), along with colleagues, then some things are self evident -

- the teacher cannot do it alone
- There must be no fear of ridicule or punishment
- Learning through attempting and making effort will mean that error and mistakes may happen, but not be ridiculed
- There will be space for initiative for learners
- There will be possibility of different pace of learning and also space to share together
- And ... there has to be ongoing learning for the teachers.

This arduous attempt is only possible on a daily basis, with attention and alertness to the events and exchanges happening in the present.

It is only growing and learning teachers who can create a school where the young will get a glimpse of a wholesome way of living and working. And what can be more meaningful than for a group of teachers to be able to share and learn from each other as equals!

I end with a quote

*“One may doubt that a school can be run without a central authority; but one really does not know, because it has never been tried. Surely, in a group of true educators, this problem of authority will never arise. When all are endeavouring to be free and intelligent, cooperation with one another is possible at all levels. To those who have not given themselves over deeply and lastingly to the task of right education, the lack of a central authority may appear to be an impractical theory; but if one is completely dedicated to right education, then one does not require to be urged, directed or controlled. Intelligent teachers are pliable in the exercise of their capacities; attempting to be individually free, they abide by the regulations and do what is necessary for the benefit of the whole school. Serious interest is the beginning of capacity, and both are strengthened by application.”*

*J.Krishnamurti Chapter 5, Education and Significance of Life*

*The author has worked as Principal of The School, KFI (1991-2009), he guided initiatives such as Mixed-Age Learning in Junior and Middle school, a dynamic wide learning programme for High School students and establishing a short-term Teacher Training programme and Active Learning for TN-SSA that went to 50,000 classrooms in 2007.*

*From 2001 he worked on the evolution of a new 100 acre campus for KFI, 80 Km from Chennai, and anchored the work related to the establishment of a small school called Pathashaala (PCFL-KFI) which began in 2010. He now serves as an Educator - Learner in Pathashaala, serving in the roles of Director and Secretary at Palar Centre for Learning (PCFL-KFI), one of the 6 educational centre of KFI.*

*The core of Gautama's work has been to facilitate a robust and sustainable staff culture so initiative for change can emerge within an educational institution.*

**SCHOOLS IN TRANSITION**

- towards fostering individual autonomy and intelligent coexistence

Indian schools as schools everywhere have to stay relevant to the context of our times. The accelerating speed of change is pushing schools to recognize that whatever we are doing, it does not matter what, can be improved nevertheless we need to be effective our children will live in a rapidly changing world and will need to learn continuously what we teach is less important than what children learn working and learning are not necessarily sequential

In the 21st century some notions are growing clear he who can learn will have an advantage over one who needs to be taught he who needs to be handheld will rapidly be expected to function intelligently, independently independence does not mean isolation collaboration does not mean one does not have to think for oneself reading carefully and expressing correctly are very important skills listening and speaking are very important skills

The challenge before schools is to reorganize and reconfigure the arrangements so that the fundamental thrusts can be effective. The exciting opportunity for schools is to deeply digest the fact that, in a changing environment, only those pegs which are at the heart of many things, at the hub, are important,.

“learning what things can I have knowledge of many things, if not all things?”

“how can such a learning be communicated?”

“what doings, structures, relationships, norms, atmosphere would create the right climate for such learning to happen?”

With these questions struggling to the surface of the civilizational bath, it appears that schools have to regroup, restructure, reorganize time, space and structure. It seems unavoidable to revisit old methodologies and polish them with the dust of even older practices. Much as Babur did before his battle with Ibrahim Lodi, sitting on the banks of Jamuna, dipped into the ancient lore of his land, we need to delve into the experience of our land, and all civilizations. We need to locate values and principles and practices / nodes which have stood the eroding test of time, the diluting influence of space and stood firm while human societies have changed dramatically.

It seems a tall order to find a set of things which individuals, from different parts of India, from different countries, can agree upon as important for their young, without conflict of interest. Much as the circle defines the centre, fortunately there seem to be some points which can be agreed upon by all.

I would like to suggest that school education can happen around a New curriculum, not of reality divided into specialized subjects but, around differently organized learning, learning around eternal issues which contain the subjects? (See next page)

It must be possible to redefine the curriculum. After all, the breaking up of the world into disciplines was one way of doing it. I recently read an article describing how the width of the booster rocket for the space reentry vehicle had dimensions that were connected to the ruts on Roman roads built during the early part of the first millenium. How long are we to be tethered in our thinking and functioning to the subject definitions? Can we redefine the practice and scope of education for the young, learning from human history?

It seems to me that if we want our children to be equipped for reosurcefulness and safety, for information and working together, we can say so, rather than leave it as implied. Then we can attempt to organize their education around the stated mandate. But this is a demanding decision. "Do we know how to teach and evaluate these things? Also are we sure that this is the right step?" It seems important to state our intention for better or for worse. And then we can try and do what is needed. There is an immense amount of material available on the net and in libraries pointing towards such education. We must endeavour to make the effort of schooling worthwhile for the student. Or else the educational endeavour will leave the student saying, "my schooling had little to do with my education." - much as Mark Twain said of his schooling and his education. (The only time my education was interrupted was when i was in school.)

**healthy & safe living**

daily routine  
anatomy, healthy living in different  
paradigms  
body posture -sitting , reading, writing  
without getting tired; food  
non harassive peer relationship  
asking for help

**resourcefulness**

always many solution to a situation  
generating alternatives, another opinion  
communication - speaking one's mind  
decision making skills  
(swot, all solutions have disadvantages)  
asking for help

**information access & action**

search, alternate views, perspectives  
understanding / comprehension/  
listening, reading, expressing  
insight

**working together / What to do with  
feelings?**

different points of view  
thoughts & feelings  
reading content and process  
intervention  
questions for clarification  
voicing what one has understood  
if i were to do it again...  
relationship with peers- collaboration  
respect

**do you know / are you clear**

how to eat and live healthily?  
how to be safe & create safety around you?  
can you ask for help when you see matters  
getting out of hand:?

**your resources**

what are your resources? physical, mental,  
emotional, creative?  
do you know how to use them ?  
are you on a narrow base or are there wide  
possibilities?  
de bono, problem soving, critical thinking.

**do you know / are you clear**

how to look for information?  
what to do with information?  
what do you do when faced with alternate  
viewpoints?  
to what sources of information are you open?  
how to learn from different disciplines - sciences,  
arts, social sciences.  
how to take a debate forward?

**do you know / are you clear**

how to be with other constructively ?  
how not to be invalidated or subsumed by peer  
culture?  
that respect for the other is not a conditional  
how to intervene in an ongoing process  
effectively, healthily?  
your feelings and those of others?  
what to do when you feel something or when  
you see emotion?  
how is insight different from an opinion, a point  
of view?

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