

*Conquer anger through gentleness,
unkindness through kindness,
greed through generosity,
and falsehood by truth.
Be truthful; do not yield to anger.
Give freely, even if you have little.
The gods will bless you.*

- Buddha

what does it mean to walk together towards
destinations that are unknown?



In these four days
I learned what to do in the morning first
after opening my eyes...
“What I am going to do in the whole day
will be a learning for tomorrow”

Dear Fellow Co-Creators -

It's taken a few days to pull things together after such a dynamic and vibrant conference. We feel extremely hopeful and energized by our gathering and are looking forward to see how these seeds spread and grow.

We're working to put together a full conference publication (with writings and images produced before the conference, at the conference and after the conference). For the post conference part of the process, we would like to have your reflections on some the following questions (feel free to pick and choose amongst these and to add more):

What do learning societies mean to you now? What do you feel is the essence of learning societies?

What ideas, projects, processes, experiences, interactions, etc., did you find useful and inspiring?

POST-CONFERENCE DIALOGUE

What new questions do you have about learning societies which you would like to explore in more detail in the future?

What do you see as potential opportunities for nurturing learning societies in your own work, life, communities, etc.?

What do you see as the challenges or tensions to unfolding learning societies in your own communities now?

What are some new actions you would like to take to help unfold learning societies?

If you could send a page or two of your thoughts or pictures, in the next week or so, we can finalize this as soon as possible. This is a really important part of the process so we request you to take time out of your busy schedules and share your reflections.

**WHAT DO LEARNING SOCIETIES MEAN TO YOU NOW?
WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE ESSENCE OF LEARNING SOCIETIES?**

From Ravi Gulati

Some of the essential elements of learning societies could be a high value placed on awareness, understanding, observing how people deal with various issues, open eyes, open hearts, trust and respect for all members, non-judgmental of people, a sense of internal holism and completeness that generates strength to welcome diversity without feeling overwhelmed/threatened by external influences, non-exclusive, fluid - easily merging in and out of other learning societies, egos under check, etc.

From Lisa Aubrey

For too long my life and my work have been separate: my work and my professional life on one hand, and my spiritual, psychic, REAL life on the other. I've used the classroom to try to bridge the two — with comparatively great success professionally, and with much less satisfaction personally. With you in Udaipur, part of my mission was to find a space where I could learn to merge my selves —to connect. My conception of learning societies allows us to do that — to be whole and real and grounded and connected. I felt this in Udaipur. Learning societies, I believe, are groups of like-minded and kindred-spirited individuals who come together to meet certain needs and pursue common desires and passions, with consciousnesses for respecting higher powers and natural forces, including the environment which nurtures, protects, feeds, and sustains us. Learning societies are not and do not have to be mutual admiration societies. There is, and should be, healthy debate and honest criticism as well. That is the way we grow and transcend.

From KB Jinan

Knowledge in a natural learning process is like a sprouting seed. The way people build their settlements; adults deal with life has biological element. This is seen in the way various game children play in villages. All meant to make them true learners. There are games for sensitizing all the senses, balancing of the body, planning, and coming to know of the life and environment around them. This biological element is visible even in their sense of beauty.

DIVERSE FOOTPRINTS IN SOUTH ASIA

In the latter portion of the publication, we seek to highlight several groups, who are working in South Asia, each in their own distinct way, to articulate and grow learning societies. These are not presented as 'solutions', but rather as practical experiences and inspirations open to critical analysis in this larger conversation.

GREETINGS FROM THE VALLEY: KRISHNAMURTI SCHOOLS

The vision of the Krishnamurti school and related organizations is to address to the entire human being. It seeks to create a change in human psyche and consciousness — not just reformations at the socio-economic-political levels. In brief it is a cultural revolution. Academics are related only to skills and making money, which in turn caters to the body and to the more mundane. Though the body is not to be neglected at all, but a body-brain-mind consciousness harmony has to be understood. The human brain over the age is conditioned to solve problems and not to understand. Hence, each solution brings in a new problem... and it is infinite.

Perhaps only Nature can touch the consciousness. Human beings should allow it and not interfere. All Krishnamurti schools have huge beautiful spaces: hills, rivers, streams, trees, flowers, wild animals too. To preserve the innocence and sensitivity of a child is the real challenge. A teacher is an external factor and whatever the teacher does caters only to the physical. It is the feeling of affection of a teacher that is crucial and not the expression in academics. Hence, we remove the authority of the teacher and allow a child, right from the beginning, to understand self-learning and responsibility. The teacher is to be at the background. It is a challenge for the teacher to be a learning partner with the child.

We have now mixed age group for the class 1 to 4 with an open class system. This breaks down comparison and competition in kids; they learn to learn from each other and learn at one's own pace. A lot of time is given for walks, songs, art, games, and the concept of silence is introduced as well. Since children have exams only in class 9 and 10, 11 and 12, we have a free hand in curriculum. A child receives space, and there is no alternative to affection.

Krishnamurti's ideas are for the person of today. He talked about flowering in goodness and the awakening of intelligence. We do face challenges when applying this to the school however. Intellectual understanding of Krishnamurti is necessary, but not good enough. A colleague of mine had once asked Krishnamurti, "What do you expect of us so as to preserve the institutions?" He said, "Can you live without ambition, greed and jealousy?"

- Satish Inamdar <thevalleyschool@vsnl.net>

From Paige Raibmon

The session with Jinan also caused me to reflect on the difference between process and product. In many cases learning processes (ways of learning/ thinking/being/doing) are equally, if not more endangered, than the specifics of knowledge itself.

For example, in the Canadian indigenous context, the difference would be between a) the ability to relate an oral narrative in a way that linked supernatural creatures, human origins, and present-day moral/practical lessons about behaviour in a subtle, indirect yet powerful manner (process) versus b) the content of the origin story itself (product). And if process is at the heart of a distinct way of being/ thinking/ learning (as I think it is), then exploring how to define it and how to facilitate conditions that enable its survival seems an important discussion to have.

From Yusef Proglor

Maybe that is a learning society, of sorts, a space where we can learn about each other, ourselves, our environments, feeling a new community, if only temporarily, and yet one which beckons for a return. Do you see?

From Kishore Saint

Some thoughts on learning, self and society. Focus on learning implies a shift from systems to self. Schooling and education have been shaped in the systems of religion, state and economy and function to serve their power and purposes. Learning as self-based autonomous nature and as social sharing, dialogue and nurture are subordinated by the demands of these command systems. This results in a loss of self and its autonomy/authenticity as learner, individually, socially and universally. Therefore, the first task for the learner or seeker becomes this recovery of self as learner, discovery of others so engaged and affirmation/ validation of this pursuit. This is also the prerequisite for *svaraj*. Beyond and even concurrent with this is learning as search for meaning and purpose.



The only thing worth globalizing is
dialogue and dissent.

- Vivek Bhandari

**WHAT NEW QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT LEARNING SOCIETIES WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO EXPLORE IN MORE DETAIL IN THE FUTURE?
QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR SOUTH ASIA?**

From Shilpa Jain

Is it possible for the dominant logic and human logic to communicate, or are these languages not translatable? Are we always reacting, and if so, how can we break that? What is the role, what is the place, of misfits like me? How can we transform notions of scarcity and abundance? How do we not let our own hypocrisy paralyze us or trap us in defensiveness, but instead, use it to generate change in ourselves and our relationships? How is Shikshantar re-defining the concept of movements, so that we don't fall into their same traps of trampling relationships and ignoring the self and each other? Not a conclusion, but new beginnings, these questions are for me the fuel for learning societies. . .

From Vineeta Sood

If we want to regenerate learning societies in South Asia, the most important questions and issues are how do we:

- Start respecting and accepting ourselves for what we are?
- Rediscover the wealth of our traditional knowledge, analyze the modern knowledge in the context of our existing realities and adapt it sparingly?
- Make this information accessible to youth and children of our region?
- Keep our minds open and alert?
- Apply the principle of trust, respect and unconditional acceptance, with a possibility of open dialogue to all our relationships with children as well as adults?
- Live in harmony with nature and environment?
- Create an environment that is conducive to natural learning?
- Find new questions?
- Identify redundant questions and irrelevant answers?
- Practically, how do we strike harmony within and around us?

MANZIL LEARNING COMMUNITY

For the last five years, I have been building (from scratch), and growing with, a learning community (without realizing to call it so) of neighbourhood children who come from humble backgrounds. I live with my mother and 'special' sister in a small apartment in the heart of New Delhi, rubbing shoulders with the rich and the powerful. For each such family, however, there are at least three more 'invisible' ones providing them with services that the Indian upper middle class takes so much for granted. It is children from those families – children of housemaids & cooks & electricians & barbers & drivers & servants – that are my buddies.

There's about 90 of them, all going to (or dropped out of, or sometimes passed out from) government schools (almost free education; dubious quality), ranging in age from 8 to 28 years. That makes for a really large family for our small house that's the center of all our activities. On the face of it, we have classes in Maths & Spoken English & Computer Basics after school as a sort of additional help. Since a government school student usually faces indifferent, sometimes hostile teachers at school, we end up doing the job of the school in its entirety in Maths & English – the two biggest demons in their lives. I began this work entirely on my own, but over the years the older students joined in to help teach the younger ones in a completely voluntary system of give and take that has evolved organically.

My real work, however, is to build a community of youth that serves as a forum for helping them discover their own potential (and reach it someday) and once they stand on a little solid ground, to give of themselves to society in any way they can. This more important, if subtle, level of our work involves creating and catching learning opportunities that come our way to together get exposed to things, people, events, thoughts and ideas, etc. that should (although they rarely do) form part of any education system. All of this happens in the context of a largish family rather than an institution, with its underlying holism, friendship and trust. We go for educational visits about the city (the most recent one was to an NGO called Karm Marg that works with runaway children), trips outside (17 of us went to Ladakh this June), invite people to come and interact (both formally and informally, and perhaps some of you would like to come sometime), practice democratic decision-making (in our weekly teachers' meeting), resolve conflicts in a civilized manner, develop leadership skills (the children organize events), strengthen independent thinking and decision making, encourage constructive approaches to issues (such as through volunteerism), smoothen parent-child relationships, help find meaningful work, etc.

- Ravi Gulati <gulatir@vsnl.com>

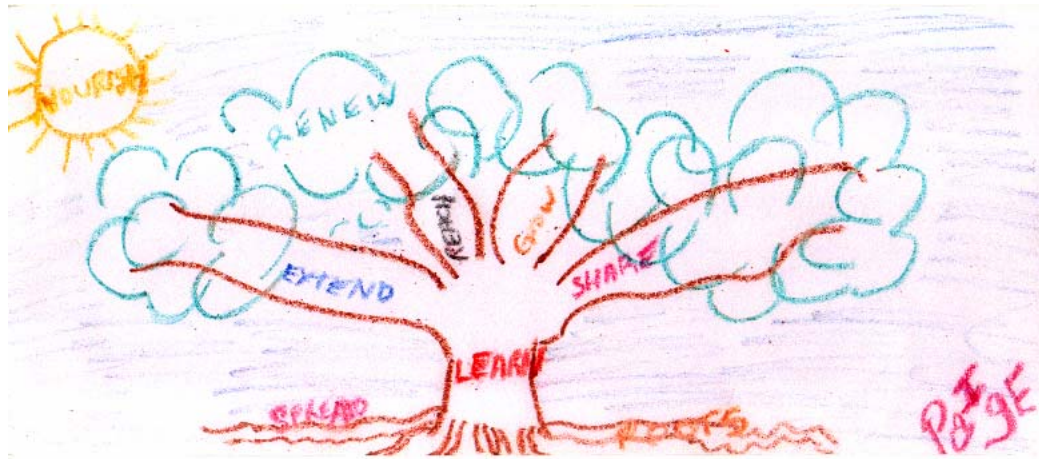


Image by Paige Raibmon

*How do we nourish the 'seeds'
that are emerging?*

- ◆ By simplicity in connection
- ◆ With everything all around us
- ◆ By continuing our questioning!!!
- ◆ Keep in touch with diversity

(responses from the reflective poster session)

From Raj Sethia

A burning desire to live in a world that fires my creativity, offers freedom to learn, a world that values human relations and transgresses false boundaries of economic/national/religious separation. But how does one go about creating a world that one wishes to live in? How does one learn to deal with hurt and violence in our lives? What does one need to learn about oneself to feel happy and satisfied?

Personally, I have identified two themes that I wish to work upon. Learning to promote the sense and spirit of freedom in our lives - because I strongly believe that freedom is what we give ourselves. Secondly developing awareness about human relations and learning to value intergenerational learning. I am still not very clear about how I could possibly concretize my ideas into action, but I am working on it. A stubborn child with a pack of 100 pieces jigsaw puzzle!

From David Wolsk

I feel it's important to provide a very broad view that responds to the wide variety of learning experiences sought by a varied group of participants. Learners come in all sizes and shapes, with their own agendas and learning styles so almost everything should be available. The one universal, that could help all learners, is an exploration of learning itself learning how to learn... There is also a need to convince many learners that they can function without a traditional teacher.

From Zainab Bawa

I am most passionate about issues of identity. Given our education system, it numbs the individual's identity. It emphasizes competition over cooperation. We learn to become individualistic in achievement, but we have lost touch with ourselves. Our education system does not recognize every individual as unique and different. This is apparent in the fact that teachers teach at a uniform pace which is not applicable to all. With the child's intelligence being insulted at every stage, he learns either to surrender or rebel. Both these are emotional baggages which we fail to acknowledge. In today's world, we face violence in various forms and in different places, be it home, family, school, work, society, etc. There is enough violence to drive each one of us mad. We have learnt to conform and to compromise our individual identities. This process begins at home (for most people) and continues

GURUKULAM: REGENERATING TRADITIONAL LEARNING

"After joining Gurukulam I can realize my potential to sing. Today I am learning Classical singing and many other interesting subjects here. Quitting school is beneficiary for me as school was more like a prison to me."
– Aman, age 9

"Now I have no pressure or fear of exam. In school I was tortured by teachers and was forced to do things there were not of my interests. With Gurukulam, I am now exploring my skills in dramatics and learning Vedic Mathematics, Sanskrit and other subjects that are relevant with my day to day living."
– Rahul, age 13

"I quit standard 9th because it was not only boring, but the environment within school was totally immoral. Today, I am very happy as I am learning Horse Riding, Tabla, Sanskrit and Ayurveda at Gurukulam."
– Jinal, age 15

"I am enjoying organic food and spinning cloth every day. I am now relaxed after quitting school."
– Luv, age 15

Inspired by Sri Hitruchi Vijayji Maharaj, 11 years ago Sri Uttamchand Shah started to un-school the 11 children who were part of his joint family. In the process, of Gurukulam (Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, Gujarat) was formed. Ayurveda, Vedic Mathematics, Astrology, Ritu Vigyan (season science), Ahar Vigyan (food science), pashu shastra (animal pedagogy), etc. *kalas* were explored by his children.

Many other parents were also inspired and began to un-school their children during this period. They believed that the present education system is anti-human and anti-nature. This system should be totally abolished, which can happen only if parents start to challenge it and regenerate faith in traditional learning/knowledge systems. Jinal, Aman, Rahul, Luv, Kush, Mitesh, Niraj, Parth are now living together and learning different *kalas* in Gurukulam. This process is based on 64 arts of woman and 72 arts of man, as described in ancient Jain scriptures. Gurukulam is also promoting traditional local agriculture, khadi, organic food and a complete non-violent lifestyle.

After 11 years, Gurukulam has helped children to understand and unfold their personal talents and potentials. Akhil (age 20), son of Uttamchand Shah, to-date has explored about 30 different *kalas*, from which he has mastered Astrology. In 2002, 12 families from the Shahibaug area of Ahmedabad were inspired by Gurukulam and decided not to send their children to school. They have started their own Gurukulam in their neighborhood.

- Sanjoy Singha <sanjoydamyanti@rediffmail.com> &
Sumi-Chandresh <jeevanpremi@hotmail.com>

and strengthens in school. How can we address the issue of conformity, individuation and freedom, ideas about community, within our current system?

From Manish Jain

Some of the themes which repeatedly underscored many of the discussions were swaraj, moving from frameworks of scarcity to abundance, the meaning of dialogue. Several concerns/opportunities emerged which I think are crucial for future discussions on learning societies, including:

- How do we support/develop local alternative economies (particular non-cash)? What kinds of alternative currencies should be encouraged?
- How to support local artisans in ways that do not make them dependent on elites and the vulgarities of the global economy? How to strengthen the webs of interdependence between them and the local economies?
- What is the linkage between food and learning? How can we encourage more production of and support for local organic food? How do we re-establish relationships between city people and small farmers?
- How can we nurture each human being to become cultural co-creators, co-authors of their own meaning, producers of diverse community media? How do we reclaim our authentic senses of beauty and aesthetics?
- What harm has literacy programmes done to local communities, other ways of knowing, human minds, multiple identities? How can we support local languages without institutionalizing them?
- How do we generate more critical discussions around the role of Information and Communication Technologies in learning?
- How can we encourage diverse forms and spaces of play (outside of cricket and national sports) that encourages creativity, collaboration and dialogue?
- How can we more deeply understand joint-family structures and support them as collective learning spaces? What are the possibilities for strengthening intergenerational learning?
- How can we more deeply understand intra-caste and inter-caste relationships and support local ways of leadership, organizing, decision-making, wisdom?
- How do we develop learning communities which support zero-waste?

- In what ways does the “civil society”/“human rights” framework stifle dissent, resistance, local forms of social organization/power and the emergence of new alternatives?
- How do we cross/break borders (official national ones as well as psychological) to strengthen learning relationships and learning opportunities?

From Maria Glauser

There is a wonderful feeling in being young and fresh in life. I feel so lucky and conscious of this point I am now in my personal development. And I value it a lot because I am afraid that it won't last forever and I don't want to lose it. I think that once I cross the “border”, belonging to an organization or project and giving so much from me there, it will be gone. I ask myself how can I learn more without losing this freshness in life? How can I protect myself from rigid mental structures? How can I protect myself from this fake security that organizations and other people's ideas seem to offer? Saying this I don't deny the power and beauty of teamwork. I believe the most beautiful things can be achieved when learning, working and growing together.

From Isaac Ochien'g

1. What are some of the things or ideas that you think a young person wanting to engage less with the text should do, or think about, in order to contribute to the realization of learning societies?
2. Learning Societies is not just an idea we want to ruminate over...it is not just a phrase we want to 'feel good' about over breakfasts and lunches and dinners. Learning Societies is our lives, it is our relationships, it is an manifestation of our eco-humanness(sic). How might I make learning societies (or the 'process' of working towards the generation of learning societies) less of an abstraction and more of a process taking place daily in our ordinary lives?

From Paige Raibmon

Dealing with concrete examples of the excellent work that people are doing forces us to articulate questions such as, What is the ideal behind this work? What are the practical necessities? What are the compromises that these necessities require?

LEARNING THROUGH THEATER

Theater-In-Education (TIE)-India Trust is totally dedicated to the children, the youth and the teachers of the country. The essential idea behind TIE is to work for and with children to provide an environment to the children themselves, to their teachers and to their parents, to use theatre as an integral part of the process of learning. It does so by creating an intergenerational space, both mental and physical, where all these stakeholders in the education of our future can open up and understand each other.

Theater has the potential to work wonderfully to address many complicated questions through collaboration with others. It also serves as a forum for sharing the natural curiosity that springs from deep inside. Asking questions, seeking answers, having fun, all of this leads to increasing concentration, developing the co-operative spirit of living together, learning to accept responsibility, and to take risks, to work hard, to lead a team, to learn to speak and be heard. Through the process, all participants feel their faith getting a boost. This is one of the most creative ways of learning, where no one controls who teaches and who learns what. Personalities keep developing, even as on the surface, it all seems a matter of play. Children find themselves gaining in strength both from within and without.

Theater enables people to tell their own stories, to express their lives in unique and exciting ways, in their own local languages. It makes us aware of our different senses, our bodies and emotions, which lets us share ourselves with others. Because TIE's work is intergenerational, people of all ages listen to and learn from each other's experiences, but through a medium which breaks classic divisions and old patterns.

Notably, TIE's work has not been confined to the capital city of Delhi, as such things often tend to be, but there is a continuing attempts to be pan-Indian in our contributions.
- Walter Peter <tie.india@indiatimes.com>

Under what circumstances (if any) are such compromises acceptable? And if certain compromises are unacceptable, what alternatives can be found?

From Nitin Paranjape

But the mainstream dominance and its influence sometimes overwhelms us. Do we strike a balance between our ways and theirs? or strive to tread our own path with our own value system, philosophy, and vision? I am convinced. How do I make my circle of influence bigger?

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE CHALLENGES OR TENSIONS TO UNFOLDING LEARNING SOCIETIES IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITIES NOW?

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR NURTURING LEARNING SOCIETIES IN YOUR OWN WORK, LIFE, COMMUNITIES, ETC.?

From Lisa Aubrey

The main challenge is countering the bankrupt dominant logic which undermines indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies. How do we maintain that which is us, that which fuels us, that which defines us? The sessions on indigenous knowledge systems and listening to elders was very useful for me in thinking about this question. The enemy is quite formidable, especially when capitalism, consumerism, prisonism, neo-liberalism (which is really conservatism), the American Dream-ism (which is really a nightmare for most) is so rampant and is being shoved down our throats in schools, churches, TVs, by our neighbors and friends, adverts, etc. The pressure is tremendous and for some insurmountable.

From Ravi Gulati

We need to begin with acknowledging that there already are learning individuals and learning societies. I think the main issue in front of South Asia is to deal with the demon of Developed-countries-are-the-role-model. As long as we are unable/unwilling to chart our own course, as individuals or groups, with confidence AND humility, we won't be able to harness the power of the already existing, nor build on that.

From KB Jinan

We must find ways to move out of the modern educational system and the knowledge it propagates, because it will only lead us to our doom. We need to de-intellectualize our present knowledge to engage in holistic knowing & intuitive knowledge.

From Vineeta Sood

I agree fully with most of whatever Jinan has said on education and learning. But I am unable to comprehend the systems you are mentioning as 'western' and 'ours'. My experience says all kinds of systems of thoughts are prevailing almost everywhere. even in our society, all this is existing doesn't matter from where it has been brought, we accepted it and are following it for such a long time. We come across so many things. It is up to us what to accept and what not to and this is a very important learning that happens if we give our children space enough to experience life and bear the consequences of their actions without making them feel guilty.

From Gurveen Kaur

The pressure and desire to join the mainstream society is there on children and remote, less privileged societies even when they can't or don't access schools. How can/will we stem the uncritical acceptance of modern, mainstream life-style? Can we change the direction of change towards more globalization, communalization, consumerist living? How can we get people to feel that this ever-widening gulf between the privileged and less privileged is not just not in any of our interests but grossly unfair? How can we get people to appreciate not just different cultures but respect the right of all plant and animal species to live on this earth?



I am scared! How will I manage to learn more without losing my freedom (freshness)? How can I escape from paradigms/rigid mind structures?

- Maria Glauser

From Nitin Paranjape

Back home, we have been discussing issues of management practise and how it is used in controlling, dividing and using people, and what could be relevant that releases creative energy, critical reflections and engages us into purposeful engagement with our own inner issues as well as relate with others with feelings. Infact, I have started to deal and value my resources that are my own - feelings, thoughts, experiences and purpose - which sometimes gets trapped in my anxieties, fears and expectations that it restricts spontaneous flow of my energies. I am now more conscious and not afraid to engage with others with issues that arise from within, which help in forming and consolidating my relationship with others.

The conference also highlighted the need to experiment with ourselves, our bodies (Peter's exercises helped in this realisation), our expressions in variety of ways without feeling any pressure, and the immense possibilities that are present. Learning is about allowing our personhood to freely express itself in various forms and moods, and getting shaped by the web of interaction and relationship that develops naturally.

LIBERATE SCHOOL

The education system operates on the assumption that if access, quality and delivery are ensured, it will successfully accomplish its mission. One needs to deeply reflect as to why do so many children drop out, even when these three elements are ensured? It is repeatedly said, "Education in school is not adapted to the needs of people." This, we believe, has nothing to do with access, quality or delivery. The reasons lie deeper, in the foundation of the system and the logic on which it operates.

Schools have a pre-defined knowledge content to deliver to all citizens of a State, and are programmed to deliver it in a certain manner. They are required to ensure an equality of opportunity to enter into unjust and unsustainable systems. The required knowledge content is defined, compartmentalised, decontextualized from people's life realities and continues to be offered in a formal, inflexible, hierarchical and abstract manner. There is no space for organic creativity or for intrinsic motivation. A strong behaviourist system of rewards and punishments underlies schooling, which does not permit risk-taking, experimenting or making mistakes. One single model is imposed on all and its parameters serve to narrowly measure and rank intelligence levels of all individuals.

Instead of a culture of teaching and passive information acquisition, Ecoliers du Monde/Aide Et Action hopes to promote a culture of life-long learning, which nurtures questioning, analysing, feeling, reflecting, owning knowledge, negotiating,

doing, self-motivation, patience, communication, collaboration, creativity, self-discipline...

With this in mind, it initiated Liberate School, a Participatory Action-Research based on participatory conceptualisation, a process to:

- analyze underlying assumptions and implications of various notions of Education and Development;
- recognize and validate indigenous knowledge systems and informal learning networks;
- emphasize learning processes (rather than on content) in all identified learning spaces.

This action-research is being conducted in partnership with three local NGOs in three different geographical zones. This will enable us to benefit from the experiences and approaches of three partner organisations, the diversity of contexts and contents of learning. All these projects recognise and validate the whole learning network, and get families to reflect on the culture of schooling and how to integrate school into the authentic learning environment of children and families. They encourage learning processes practised in various learning spaces: seeing, observing, doing, making mistakes. They use traditional as well as new learning spaces, like those where children play or work, existing women's groups, existing farmers' groups, local media, etc.

We are engaged in a process, and do not necessarily know what awaits us at the other end. Our conviction lies in the fact that there is tremendous wealth within communities and that its discovery will be a guide to new solutions.

- Raj Sethia <liberateschool@rediffmail.com>

Learning and living and
unlearning to get rid of the
dominant logic requires us to be
in the process of 'becoming'.

Are we all ready?

- Satyabrata Barik

I trust the purity of our
collective motivation.

Let us diligently enrich it for
the present moment.

- Prashant Varma

CROSS-POLLINATING LOCAL KNOWLEDGES:

THE HONEY BEE NETWORK

All these years, formal knowledge networks have ignored informal knowledge networks. Perhaps they considered the marginalization of knowledge-rich, economically-poor communities and individuals as inevitable. Perhaps the mega-project of progress considered these voices to be road blocks, to either be ruthlessly leveled or bypassed entirely.

But times are changing. Consider current ecological disturbances, the immense social discomfort they cause, and the increasing inability of the mainstream to cope with these problems. My feeling is that the skills, knowledges and institutions evolved by people on the margins will become a major source of survival.

The Honey Bee Network is part of SRISTI, a non-governmental organization set up to strengthen the creativity of grassroots inventors, innovators and eco-preneurs engaged in conserving biodiversity and developing eco-friendly solutions to local problems. The network and newsletter help to support the scouting, spawning, sustaining and scaling up of grassroots green innovations. They also enable innovations to link with enterprises and investments.

The name 'Honey Bee' was chosen for its connotations of authenticity, accountability and fairness. Honey bees do two things: they collect pollen without impoverishing the flowers, and they connect flower to flower

through pollination. Relating this to the network, the idea is that when we collect peoples' knowledge, we should ensure that people don't become poorer after sharing their insights with us. Further, we should also connect one innovator with another through feed back, communication and networking in the local language.

When we write in the English language, it connects us globally but alienates us locally. We cannot reach the people from whom we have learnt. There is tremendous global interest in the knowledge of local communities, but the ethics of this interest and exploration continue to be exploitative and asymmetrical. Articulating the ethics of knowledge extraction, documentation, dissemination and abstraction into theories, institutions or technologies is thus the central concern of the Network.

Over the years, the Honey Bee Network has documented innovations, traditional practices. It has collected outstanding examples of contemporary knowledge to form a 10,000 strong database (Honey Bee Database of Grassroots Innovations).

We may avoid discussing people living on the margins, but the questions they raise do not go away. Many local knowledge experts will pass away in the coming years, and so will the survival knowledge they carry with them. Who or what will fill these vacant spaces?

- Anil Gupta <honeybee@sristi.org>

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS/ACTIVITIES THAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN TO HELP UNFOLD LEARNING SOCIETIES IN SOUTH ASIA?

From Vivek Bhandari

In my own life, I am increasingly questioning the ways in which I have been institutionalized. This interrogation has also made me increasingly aware of the need to identify those spaces of engagement, dialogue, and creativity that sustain us in these times of anomie. I do not for an instant believe that the prevailing mood of sadness is going to last forever, perhaps because in South Asia one can find learning spaces in all kinds of places, the sorts of places that the modernist lens simply does NOT have the capacity to look.

For me, life in India demonstrates that spaces for creative articulation flourish in all sorts of nooks and crannies. The real challenge of course, is to identify and energize these spaces, defined as they are by alternative material, ecological, and cultural realities. "Multiple publics," as I like to refer to them in my work as an alternative the "mainstream public," have to potential to reshape our understanding of the challenges confronting us, because they draw upon endless, regenerative reserves of learning. For me, the next step is to think outside of my institutional lens, and work towards identifying and energizing the learning that happens in these multiple public spaces.

From KB Jinan

(1) Protecting ecosystems knowledge would involve creating self respect and worthiness in them about their knowledge so that they continue to practice it. We must make efforts to meet them and create confidence in them...

(2) As we are engaged in understanding another way of knowing we have to acquire the tools needed for the same. Intuition happens to be the tool and it can only be developed by deliberately engaging in non-intellectual experience. I have developed a workshop called 'against the tyranny of reason' which is an attempt

to re-look at our habits, sensitising the senses etc. Shift knowledge from head to heart... What we need to do in this situation is to find our authentic self. To relocate oneself in a different cultural space where we begin to ask the right questions. This requires us to de-school, de-intellectualize to recover own intuitive and authentic self.

(3) Developing materials to create crises with people in the reason culture. Of course, this has to be non-intellectual materials... I am already doing some work in this area and co operation is welcome.

From Chandita Mukherjee

In this world, being over-run by monster conglomerates, no border is sacred any more and no nation state can erect barriers to keep them out. Under such circumstances, the only way that people can keep their self-respect is if they can build their capacities for resistance, and they can keep their environments from being stripped of resources and destroyed forever. This has to happen in their villages and farms, hills and forests, within their knowledge systems and practices of agriculture, animal-rearing and craft manufacture.

Knowingly or unknowingly the educated have de-legitimised the traditions of people's knowledge, and do not recognise its value. This is a chance to do some corrective action, by bringing it to the foreground, and creating respect for the keepers of this knowledge among the arrogant educated, giving the latter some provocation, and a way out of their own sense of suffocation. This is the potential opportunity I see for my own practice as a communicator in the upcoming period.

From V. Manikuttan

As a yoga instructor, I am able to share the wisdom of ancient culture to my children. In this way, I can connect the past with the modern. I am also very much interested to do more in this field, because in this way, I can create a new world with the traditional ethos or values.



MIRAMBIKA: FREE PROGRESS SCHOOL

Mirambika is a small school and a teacher training center within the premises of Shri Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi. It is based on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's philosophy of education. According to them, there are three principles of learning:

1. Nothing can be taught; so here the teacher does not impart knowledge to the child. Instead, she helps him discover how best he can learn.
2. The child's mind must be consulted in its own growth; each one of us has some gift within us. If we don't hamper child's natural tendencies, he will learn in a very special way.
3. Work from near to far; from what the child can experience in his immediate surroundings to more abstract things.

In Mirambika, children are nurtured physically (through a lot of time for free play), emotionally (through loving and caring teachers who give full importance to the child's thoughts and feelings), mentally and intellectually (through the rich environment and freedom to explore it). All this leads to the vital and spiritual growth of the child.

As children grow and get interested into different fields, they want to do research in greater depth in their field of interest. So, they choose their own topics and do research according to their own engagement with the subject, which means even if they choose the same topic, the outcome for each child is different. And wherever required, they use numbers also in their projects e.g., calculating area and distance when the project is on the physical space. A web of integrated learning is created so that the experiences of children are not segregated. A few of the projects taken by the students in the recent past are listed:

- Entertainment in ancient civilizations (11-12 years), to understand the past and create a feeling of continuity;
- September 11th (over a broad age group), to analyze and understand a range of issues related with the tragedy;
- Water harvesting (13-14 years), to revive the ashram's dried-up rainwater harvesting system. This year's outgoing group of students did research on it and prepared a proposal for using the system.

Mirambika has its share of challenges also, as it's not easy to survive when you try to do something different from the norm. The children from Mirambika have to ultimately fit into regular system of schooling after class VIII. CBSE/ICSC being the only options available with the regular schools, Mirambika is pressurized to prepare the children accordingly. This also deters the long-term commitment of parents to the system.

Mirambika believes that dedicated people can come to the institution if they are not lured by salaries. Getting such people, who will commit themselves to the institution on a long-term basis as volunteers, also presents a challenge, as does preparing the teachers. Those who go through Mirambika's teacher training programs acquire valuable skills of being a sensitive, innovative and efficient teacher, but find it hard to get recognition outside Mirambika. Getting the program recognized by any board has its pitfalls, since such recognition will dilute its strengths and compromise its quality.

Mirambika presents a model of a system that shows how children learn in a much positive way when they get the respect, affection and freedom to decide the course of their learning within broad limits of the system. In this sense, it strengthens the vision behind learning societies, as here we believe that learning is at its best when the learner is exposed to life in the most natural way and is enabled to trust himself and his surroundings.

So far as the impact of Mirambika on the larger education system is concerned, it still remains a bold experiment not within the range of everybody. Every now and then people look at it with admiration, pick up a couple of things from here and there, but not the spirit behind it. Some see it with scorn and doubt. But it does show a path to those who are willing to see the wonders when we place trust in the learners. It also shows alternative ways of teaching and learning to more conventional mind.

- Vineeta Sood <vineetasood@hotmail.com>

Contact Mirambika, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, opposite Sarvodaya Enclave, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi; phone: 011-26863741. fax: 011-26857449; for more information.

From Shilpa Jain

There are many exciting things on the horizon: the learning journey with Alok and Zaid; working on the Multiversity library and roaming exhibition with Claude and Abhivyakti; a play on "Who is Educated?" with Peter; exploring our full human potential workshops with Ravi's kids at Manzil; an article on exposing the educational services enterprise with Vineeta; smaller learning societies conferences with youth in India through Qutab Khan; a forum on unlearning with Munir; the Radical Essential Series with Yusef; the World Youth Leadership Jam with Coumba... and of course, many things within Shikshantar's own team: organic farming with more families in the city, creative workshops and festivals with children and youth; new research publications on rethinking literacy and stories of unlearning. Actually, my head starts to spin when I think about how much there is to do, and how much more learning will come out of it.

From Purnima Rai

The conference churned up a lot of ideas... One might involve working out some sort of a center for children of craftspeople. This is something Jinan and I have been talking about for long. Surprisingly, we never seemed to have found the space to articulate many of these issues with each other – the Udaipur conference certainly gave us the opportunity.

From Nitin Paranjape

- Edit the video about the conference with Manish
- Dialogue with others whom I meet and discuss about promoting learning societies
- Discuss ways in which our own project Self-directed Learning evolves organically
- Collaborate with Shikshantar on exchange of team members, plan and organise a yatra, and a video series on South Asian thinker-doers
- Constantly thinking of ways in which Abhivyakti can evolve into a socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and culturally responsible work place
- Have discussed with Peter about collaborating on a theatre workshop in Nashik
- Promised Ravi that we would document on video about small power project in Uttaranchal
- Thinking deeply and listening to friends about Sakhi's future schooling
- Have invited Claude to visit Nashik and interact with farmers, team members
- Translate some of the articles that have appeared in Vimukt Shiksha series to the Marathi language.

From Mahanand Charati

I want to start a small project, especially relating to "innovative learning"... I plan to keep in touch with other active participants to enrich myself.

From Isaac Ochien's

As someone editing a publication for young people, within the context of Learning Societies, *The Counter Renaissance* will have young African people (and even the not-so-young) doing things (whether writing, singing, drawing, farming, etc) *then* sharing these in *The Counter Renaissance*.

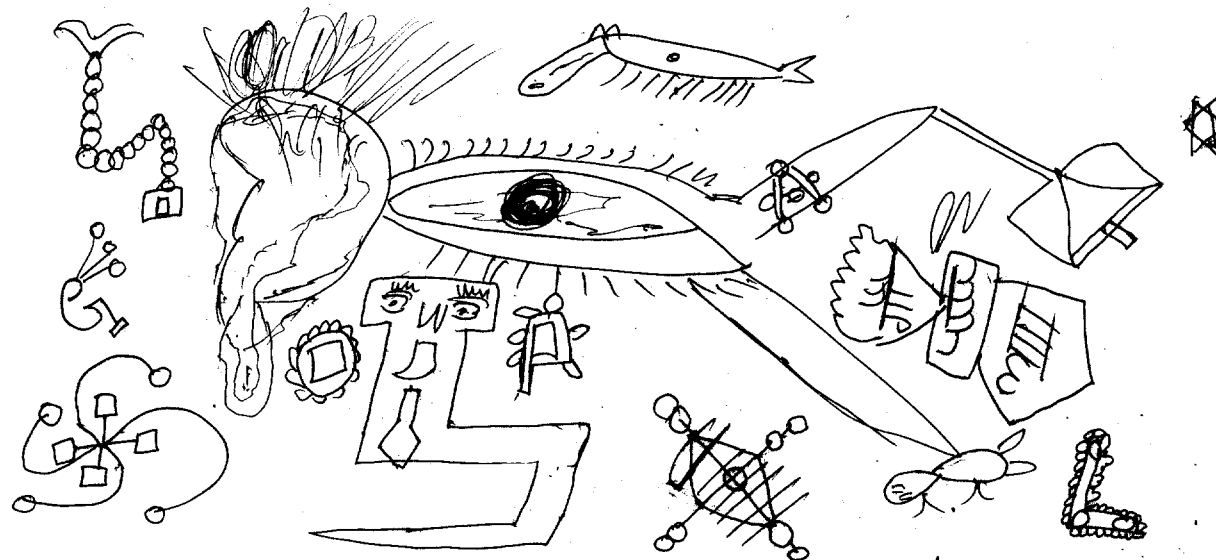


Image by Gopal Lal Sharma

(The latter process is what I would call a counter renaissance). It is very important that this emerges spontaneously so that in fact, *The Counter Renaissance* is not seen as only a publication...rather, a spirit around which people get energized to do things that both ask important questions about what they see and experience as well as regenerate—relationships, etc. At the moment I do not feel there is anything spontaneous about *The Counter Renaissance*...this is the tension that I am trying to negotiate right now...maybe things will get clearer when I get down to working with African people in Kenya but then again isn't KENYA what I make it here, with the young university students here?

From Manish Jain

Some of the activities that emerged (or became more clear)

from the conference which I would like to commit myself to for the upcoming year are:

- * Developing a small video on the Learning Societies Conference and a publication on the Conference (with Nitin, Rajiv, Praveen, Shilpa and Susanne)
- * Organizing a conference with 25-30 young 'walk-outs' on what we can learn from drop-outs who are innovators – what kinds of learning webs do they build for themselves? (with Claude, Anil, Sumi-Chandresh, Nitin)
- * Organizing Learning Journeys with local youth of Udaipur on social movements (with Sudhir and Ravi), on organic farming (with Kameshwarji, Claud), visit to Pakistan (with Claude, Nitin, Wasif)
- * Organizing a Travelling Interactive Exhibition for families on Learning Societies (with Claude /

Multiversity and Anita, Ganesh, Sujata / Abhivyakti)

- * Developing a project with Qutab Khan and Jinan on “What can we learn from rural illiterate people?”
- * Sharing a presentation on the learning societies conference at the World Social Forum (with Susanne Schnuttgen)
- * Publishing a booklet on Interrogating Literacy (with Munir and Shilpa)
- * Publishing a book on Stories of Unlearning (with Isaac, Shilpa, Yusef, Zaid, Coumba, Vineeta, Lisa, Meg, Rick, Pat, Jan, Susanne, Marianne, Sheela, Maria, Anita)
- * Publishing a book on local folk-stories which elaborate different aspects of a learning society (with Shilpa, Claude, Nitin)
- * With Komal Kothari, developing an interactive museum on folk culture from Rajasthan
- * Working with Satish Inamdar on hosting a follow-up conference of Learning Societies next year in Bangalore
- * Working with Qutab Khan on organizing a youth camp on Learning Societies
- * Working with Munir Fasheh and Hegazi Idris on hosting a Learning Societies Conference in the Arab region.

From Maria Glauser

After listening to some people’s experiences and dreams, many ideas came to my mind. There are many important things I would like to work on going back to Paraguay. Organic farming is something I would like to do in my country; my family owns some land outside the city, my brothers are interested as well. I am glad that staying in Udaipur together with the fantastic people that work at Shikshantar I have the chance to learn more about it. But why did I need to come so far away to learn something that is right there as well?

But there are other things that I find not only important but urgent for me to work on. I need to know my people better. I feel very ashamed of myself for not properly speaking *guarani*, our native language spoken by 90% of the population in Paraguay. I recognize I belong to the little group of people in the city that has food every day and can choose to get a higher education or is able to travel to India. I owe my people too much, not only because I have so many privileges at their expenses but because I love them so much. In this sense, I must be closer to them, even though I know I will never be one of them.

I need to open my eyes soon and look at the beautiful things that are so close around me.

TIME FOR A NEW REVOLUTION

Western-inspired agricultural science -- based on the use of synthetic chemicals and toxic pesticides, special seeds and thirsty plants -- has taken over large areas of the South, through the agency of intellectually-bankrupt governments. Though this development has been passed off as a ‘green revolution’, it is already threatening to turn vast areas into brown deserts. The modern practices not only destroy the soil, but they also lead to ecological imbalance.

Indian farmers are steadily deserting such anti-ecological farming practices. On September 11, 2002, at Thanjavur, south India, Mohamed Idris inaugurated a new organic farming institution called the Vazhviyal Multiversity <www.indiaorganic.org>. It seeks to become a focal point for undermining official agricultural science and replacing it with ecological farming and living.

The Vazhviyal group has successfully tried out several new procedures for raising crops of different kinds outside the conceptual framework of modern agriculture science and its inputs. They have rediscovered several important traditional insights dealing with soil fertility and the control of pests. They are credited with the invention of a locally-made microbial brew (called “Panchakavya”), which has helped them solve a basic problem organic farmers face: temporary declines in productivity during the period that they convert their fields from chemicals to organics. With the help of the brew, they can now convert their fields into organic farms without loss in yields, within a year itself.

Confident now of the success of their procedures, the organic farmers have taken a decision to start their own learning and teaching centers – not only for existing organic farmers, but also for those who wish to convert from chemicals to organics. These centers will offer practical training without certification and will operate completely outside the formal academic agricultural science framework.

In the coming months, Vazhviyal farmers will also be working on methods/techniques to certify their foods as organic, as well as a unique learning program for their children, different from the formal school framework.

- Claude Alvares <miversity@sancharnet.in>

parents' reflections on unschooling

Greetings from Nasik!

I am writing to you because yesterday something happened between me, Anita and Sakhi. While riding home on the scooter Sakhi announced that she would not like to continue with her schooling after class 7th. She is in class 6th right now.

I am not sure at this moment about my response. Although my heart is in agreement, my head says that she should at least complete her 10th. But I would like to explore this issue with you since we and Sakhi are part of the universe of learning society.

How should we approach this issue? What are the ways in which Sakhi could engage herself with learning and discovering the world. She has been also telling us that her dream is to become a neurosurgeon! How to chart her growth that would be meaningful, and in her best interest, which would help her realise her potential.

I am looking forward to your support.

Regards,

Nitin Paranjape - Anita Borkar

From Lisa Aubrey

Greetings to all. Kaari and I are back in Louisiana, sharing and being nurtured by family. This is the best transition from Udaipur before we get back to work and school in Ohio. Nitin, Anita, and Sakhi, we are feeling what you are going through. Kaari's sentiments, though expressed with deeper sadness about having to leave Udaipur and all of you, mimic Sakhi's desires. What do we do? This question keeps rolling back and forth in my heart and my mind as we share with family our experiences in Udaipur. Kaari is animated as she talks about her experience and as she questions conventional schooling. My family is interested, confused, and intrigued — not wanting us to leave again, saying that leaving school is an unthinkable. They are asking me lots about India, our plans, likeness to Africa, my health, racial understanding, spaces for girls.... Nitin, Anita, Sakhi let's continue to talk about and feel this. I trust that with more questions, the answers will come.

From Raj Sethia

I shared the mail from Nitin-Anita regarding Sakhi's (un)schooling with Suchita, my wife. We have had and continue to have serious dialogues about our daughter Ateesha on very similar lines. Here! I welcome you to join our group.

Comments from an outsider (Suchita):

Nitin, you sound as confused as Raj. On one hand you say that Sakhi wants to quit school, yet she also wants to become a neurosurgeon. Don't you feel that it could also mean that she is still a young child developing her own understanding of life and what we adults do in our lives. But what about you, Nitin and Anita. Didn't you need more time (speak = age and maturity) to decide about your lives?

As parents you must show both sides of the coin to Sakhi. Is she able to really understand the meaning of leaving school after seventh class. If she wants to become neurosurgeon, inspite of all the knowledge she may gain, can she become a neurosurgeon without degree or registration.

Here is my story. I have learnt a lot from my father-in-law, who has been studying books and even researching about Homeopathy for over thirty years. He has even cured one person with ulcers when all doctors only talked of surgery. He knows how to make plants greener by using homeopathy medicine. Having moved to Bhopal, I have taken over as the family Homeopath and treat Raj, Ateesha and now after one year, even my landlord's children. But still I don't have a degree and

people don't have faith on me. I am struggling to get a homeopathy degree, but it takes five years and right now I can't give so much time.

It's not just me. Same with Dr. Samuel Hahneman, the father of homeopathy. He also did not have any school degree. He researched and invented homeopathy. But to prove his study he had to get a medical degree. I feel that in my earlier years if I had studied homeopathy, I would have started a practice now. Now I only practice on Raj and Atesha. It is better if you give both choices to Sakhi. You only live once, so keep all opportunity open for Sakhi. Only then can you live full.

From Kamala Menon

If your little girl does not want to study in a school in class 7, it does not mean she cannot become a neurosurgeon. She could study with the local vet instead. She could study with you, I believe that what school does you can do better. Yes, she will miss friends, ask her consult her and then decide, remember nothing can be taught, consult the learner, the ultimate is harmony Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on education, so also Gandhi and Makarenko

From Steve Rudolph

Well, one step you could take would be homeschooling. This would enable you to create a robust learning environment at home for Sakhi while still keeping a path open for her for higher education. In case you are still skeptical about undertaking the formal correspondence learning through the Indian school system, there are other systems internationally which you might be able to affiliate

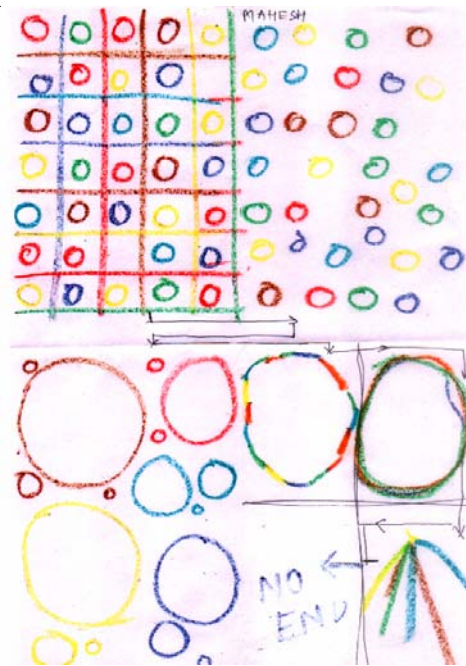


Image by Mahesh Naik

with, which would provide an internationally recognized certification that would provide her access to colleges.

Sakhi has indicated an interest in science/healthcare. Perhaps you could start with a dialogue about what is that interests her about that profession, and then collaboratively create a concept web that identifies the different type of people involved in healthcare. You could help her identify the jobs which require certain qualifications, and which don't (e.g., neurosurgery, massage therapy, social work/field work, nursing, Reiki, counselling). She can then plot out paths that might lead to these professions. Perhaps she could meet with workers in these lines and visit their

workplaces to get a feeling for what their professions are like. In the process, she might reconfirm that neurosurgery is what she wants to head toward, or might even decide that this line isn't really for her. Whatever the case, she would be performing the valuable exercise of thinking through the paths required to reach a specific goal.

I would even use this as an opportunity to have Sakhi discover more about herself and her learning style. You can draw off of Howard Gardener's work of multiple intelligences. This always seems to fascinate people when they analyze themselves—especially children (we've done this with our students in our school). Afterwards, she might re-examine different career choices based on her own self-analysis.

If she is interested in writing, you might have her write a journal about her thoughts and feelings, as this would be an excellent complement to the process of reflection and self-discovery. Anyway, some ideas that came to me as I read your post. Do keep us updated on what happens.

Look at this world full of
 Institutions – jails, hospitals,
 Schools, military to control people,
 To treat people, to mold people, to train people
 Into an obedient civilians/robots
 Who can follow the linear,
 Ready-made path
 That leads towards Development
 And Progress –
 Unjust, Unhealthy, Unsustainable and inhumane living...
 The passage is worth exploring
 Coz it gives security
 It has insurance
 Say the advocates
 Of this passage.
 They order too, if you
 Try to challenge them
 Who are they
 Why do they want to play
 This finite game
 Full of violence and exploitation/control
 Instead for me, the more interesting
 Thing is that I am
 In the middle of this game
 Kind of a dice controlled and rolled
 By others
 For me the important thing
 Is that I have
 Discovered that I am
 One of the instruments
 To excel the game and
 Empower the passage
 Worth to know here that
 My discovery –
 The knowing of my slavery
 Is due to listening
 Not to my mind but
 To my heart



And to my soul
 Sensitivity towards the inner voice
 Which always is
 Telling me the stories of
 Possibilities
 Infinite and eternal
 Showing me the path without destination
 Like a voyage towards
 SELF
 It's not about falling in Love
 But being in Love forever
 Merging into the unknown
 Melting with the essence of the
 Unknown
 The passage still exists
 Not for me but for those
 Who are in process of
 Fixing things
 There is nothing left to fix
 I am in flow
 Which is growing every moment
 Growing with the unknown
 The passage still exists
 For those who are in
 Process of becoming
 But life is a process of happening
 A process of being
 Beyond mind there is
 Infinite sky of possibilities
 That I can see now
 The possibilities of being
 In love forever
 The possibilities to connect with
 Gentle Souls
 With grace and hope...
 Creating a foundation of sensitivity, prudence and intelligence.

- Manav

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“When someone says in Zulu or Xhosa ‘I hope we shall meet again’, he or she is not expressing a spiritual desire, but means simply that ‘your actions and my actions should be such that we meet again; if you fail or I do, the responsibility is ours’. And on that note, I hope we shall connect again.”
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