

PERSPECTIVE

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AVEF EDITORIAL:

TEACHING IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION



The terms “Information Age” and “technological advances” are the latest catch phrases. Around the world, people marvel at how the technological explosion has altered their lives, and wonder what the future holds for their children. As an educator, it is easy to see the effects of technological innovations, both in and out of the classroom.

Students and teachers alike have been quick to utilize these technological advances. Entire new fields of education have been born, and existing areas fundamentally altered. Lectures are filled with audio-visual materials, and student presentations often include



PowerPoint presentations. Teachers are able to quickly type up and print handouts, while students can turn in neatly typed and spell-checked essays. In

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schools and universities around the world, computer laboratories have sprung into existence, bringing with them the Internet and its endless supply of information.

However, despite living in the Information Age, it can be argued that nothing has fundamentally changed in the world of education. When the layers of technology are peeled away, when the computers, monitors, and projectors are removed, the essence of education remains, and will always remain—for it is the relationship between the teacher and student that is the core of education. As long as a teacher is dedicated to helping his or her students progress personally, socially and academically, the medium will always be secondary.

In fact, it is now more imperative than ever that teachers tend to the personal and social, as well as academic, development of their students. Who else but a teacher can help an individual learn to sift through and evaluate the overwhelming amount of information available? With the vast



amount of instantly available material, knowledge acquisition becomes secondary to critical thinking and analytical skills. It takes self-confidence for a child to rely on his own ability to analyze and accurately interpret the world of information around him. It is in a secure and trusting teacher-student relationship that the child can develop a deep sense of self-confidence.

In today's high-speed world, it is a skill such as teamwork and leadership that pave the way to success, rather than the ability to memorize and regurgitate

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esoteric facts. In order to effectively participate in a team, or lead a group, a child will need to value the opinions, ideas, and suggestions of others. Teachers can model and nurture these skills in children, and provide opportunities for their enhancement.

Perhaps it could be said that the main change wrought by the “Information Age” is the growing global awareness of the need to educate the whole child, and the necessity for teachers to develop an understanding with their students in order to create a meaningful educational experience for the student, and nurture the personal, social and academic progress of the child. Schools provide ideal settings for children to discover how to harness technology to serve their own purposes, and teachers provide ideal companions for these voyages of exploration.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS



EXTERNAL WORKSHOP

A workshop on Child Focused Teaching (CFT) and Activity Based Learning (ABL) for teachers and parents was given at Presentation School, Melukavumattom,



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KPM
APPROACH TO CHILDREN

Kerala, on November 10th, 2006. To begin with, Mrs. Sheridan Wilson, Mrs. Bindu R. and Mr. Unnikrishnan Nair B. presented activities for the teachers. Then, Mrs. Wilson gave a speech in English, which Mrs. Bindu R. translated into Malayalam, to both the teachers and the parents. The speech included anecdotes from Sri Atmananda Memorial School.

The main topic of the speech was, “Since the world that your children live in is a global village, their personal and social skills will be equally as important as their cognitive skills. Parents and teachers will play a key role in helping children develop these skills.” The speech began by discussing the importance of the child’s feelings and the significant role teachers play in the personal, social and cognitive development of their students. From there, the speech went on to address the vital role that parents play in their child’s growth. The parents were encouraged to think seriously about what kind of life they wanted for their children. They were asked some questions to consider, such as, “Do you want your child to have a job he is happy in, or is your child’s happiness less important than his earning a high salary?” The home environment was also addressed, and the parents were asked to consider the following points:

- What is the effect of family clashes on children?
- How deeply does insecurity burrow into children’s souls when their parents quarrel?
- How do children compensate for that insecurity? Where do they go to feel love?
- Why do so many young children turn to drugs?
- Why does Kerala have such a high student suicide rate?

After raising these questions, the speech addressed measures parents can take to improve their child’s quality of life and give them a better future. The first suggestion was for parents to spend time with their children in doing something



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fun. This would help the children relax and feel that the parents only desire their happiness and wellbeing. Secondly, parents should encourage their children to do their best, and not constantly compare them to others. None of us are identical; we all have different strengths and weakness. By valuing their children's uniqueness, parents can let their children know that they are appreciated. Finally, parents were advised to listen to their children and see how much their children open up to them. Children need interaction with their parents, because parents are their first source for learning how to become an adult. If an open relationship with a child is not maintained, he or she may develop unhealthy relationships with someone else. By closing with suggestions and advice, the speech equipped both the parents and teachers with tools to strengthen their relationships with children.

Afterwards, the participants said the speech had touched on meaningful points. For many of the parents, the speech provided new information and a new way of seeing their child. Following the warm reception of the workshops and speech, the school PTA requested more future workshops.

INTERNAL WORKSHOPS

At the request of the Head of Teacher Development at Sri Atmananda Memorial School, the Training Department has been giving workshops for the Upper Primary and High School teachers. These workshops are a refresher course in the Four Basic Aims. The topics range from how to handle social issues among the students, to the challenges teachers face in keeping a strong relationship with the students.

For example, in the High School training workshops, the teachers were divided into three groups. Each group was then asked to create two possible dialogues—the first from a conventional approach to education, and the second

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from the KPM Approach to Children—with High School students for a given situation. The three situations were of how to respond if:

- A child is bored in class
- A child is humiliating others in the class
- A child is impolite and rude

After some time spent in discussing these, the teachers reconvened into a large group, where each division presented both their dialogues. At the end of each presentation, the whole group discussed the dialogues and provided more input from the KPM Approach to Children. In this context, the impact of the way in which a teacher talks to a High School/Plus-Two student was also discussed.

The three principal points for discussion were:

- Teachers should talk to older students in the same way as to adults
- Teachers should, at the same time, remain honest
- Teachers should always keep a positive outlook

The teachers found the workshops productive, and asked for follow-up sessions.

2006 GRADUATION PROGRAMME





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Parents, teachers, staff and friends assembled at the High School campus on December 20th, 2006, to honour Sri Atmananda Memorial School's seventh graduating class. The Principal, Smt. Tarla Nanavati, introduced the graduating students with a speech on the significance and foresight of the KPM Approach to Children in today's fast changing world:

“Recently an article appeared in the newspaper on the topic of building a world-class India by 2020. The article mentioned that one of India's biggest strengths is our people. Their talent has to be nurtured and made globally competitive. For that, we must reform our educational system. Instead of rote learning, education must focus on nurturing creativity, building self-esteem, encouraging curiosity to learn and inculcating a strong sense of values. Learning should become a process of discovery. It is with great foresight that Sri Adwayananda has given India an Approach to Children which will provide a way for India to meet the challenge of becoming a world- class country. His care for the children is reflected in their happiness and love for the school.”

Following this, each twelfth standard student stepped forward to receive a copy of the yearbook from Tarla Teacher, and to bear testimony to the Approach and its impact on their own lives, in words that touched the listeners. One example follows:

“This is one of the unique ways of our school's approach, valuing the child in spite of all odds and bringing him up so as to value others. Let me take leave with a heart full of gratitude to each one in the school, especially to all my teachers. I bow my head in deep gratitude to my father, my loving mother, and my sisters, who allowed me to continue my studies against all odds.”



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The speeches presented by the graduating students can be downloaded from the website at <http://www.kpmapproach/index.php?/news/924>

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Many of the School's students, parents and well-wishers are curious to know more of Sri Atmananda Memorial School graduates. They wonder how they fare in college and the professional world, and how they view the education they received at the School. Recently, Girish Ravi, an alumnus who graduated with the school's first class, attended Speaker's Corner to talk about his successful engineering studies and experiences in the working world.

To begin with, Girish attributed the ease with which he studied and learned in his higher studies to the Approach he was raised in at Sri Atmananda Memorial School. He reminisced about his Lower Primary daily plans and discussions with his classmate Gopu on the making of an imaginary robot, and the many experiments and adventures he had in the Upper Primary. He said that since he had always been encouraged to experience things first-hand, that once he entered the upper classes with their more abstract content, he naturally tried to understand and visualize whatever was presented. This effective study habit also served him well in college. While working, Girish decided to get an M.B.A. by correspondence, and found the courses easy because he was able to draw from his on-the-job experience.

Girish then explained that he found his engineering studies, in instrumentation, relatively easy. While he listened attentively to lectures and took brief notes, he mainly focused on comprehending and visualizing the lecture subject. This approach enabled him to answer exam questions easily, in contrast to many of his schoolmates, who spent hours trying to memorize the entire textbook and



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still found exams difficult. He also noticed that he was able to balance study with leisure, and was therefore more relaxed than many of his college mates.

Girish also spoke of the importance of self-motivation. Although learning had been relatively easy for him, he said that his wish to do well and work had been essential to his success. He also advised the students that the rank in the engineering entrance examination was much less important than the subsequent performance in university work. One of the students asked him whether his college professors had been as helpful as his school teachers had been, and he replied that he did not develop close relationships with his college professors: they came to class, gave their lectures and then left. When one student asked Girish if it had been difficult to manage without the support he had been accustomed to from his school teachers, he answered that what he had received at the school remained with him, sustaining him through his college days and beyond.

Finally, Girish related how he had gone from being an engineering student to becoming the all-Kerala sales manager for his company: While studying instrumentation, he had discovered the field had few job opportunities in Kerala. After graduating, he happened to see an advertisement for a position with a Coimbatore-based firm marketing global positioning devices, and spontaneously applied. When asked during the interview about a particular physics portion, he candidly replied that he had no experience with the topic, as he was a recent graduate. His honesty, coupled with his self-confidence, must have impressed his future employers, because they hired him the next day. A few months into his job, to show their appreciation for his fine work, his employers asked what he would like, and he requested a transfer back home to Kerala. His employers immediately promoted him to the only post available: state Sales Manager.



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Even while recounting his academic and professional success, Girish's self-confidence and flexibility was striking. During his speech, some of the boys noticed that he had picked up the habit of using the word "basically," and started counting the number of times he said the word. Girish quickly figured out what they were doing, and, undaunted, confessed his habit, and asked how many times he had used the word so far. The boys, appreciating his openness, readily replied. He then explained that he had picked up the habit while in sales training, because the company wanted him to understand "the basics" of the business.

Girish's visit to Speaker's Corner helped ease some of our senior students' anxieties about succeeding in their studies and achieving goals such as entering engineering school. While Girish's many achievements since his high school graduation are impressive, what is most noteworthy is the value this personable, intelligent young man places on his KPM Approach education and its role in his success.

MODEL SCHOOL STATEMENT

November 1st, 2006, marked the 50th year of the formation of the state of Kerala. This day was celebrated throughout the school. Fifty lamps were lit in each section of the school. Trees were planted in the Upper Primary Section, and the children planted a coconut seedling in the High School Section. The Lower Primary section honoured the occasion with a local Thiruvathira dance and various activities with themes including Kerala's spices and districts.



After the Onam holidays, the Upper Primary, High School and Plus-Two children worked busily on their Expo projects. Parents and well-wishers were invited to the Expo on

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December 12th, 2006, and to the Recognition of the Graduates and the Performances on December 20th. The students, with the help of teachers, choreographed the Graduation ceremony and all the programmes. (For details, see **GRADUATION CEREMONY, 2006** article.)



In September, 2006, after ten years of service, Sri Surendran Babu retired. A farewell was arranged by the teachers and staff. (For details, see **FAREWELL TO MR. SURENDRAN BABU** article.)

In November, Mr. Johnny Sand of Sweden, who had trained in the school during the 2004-5 academic year, returned for a month to volunteer at the School. The teachers and children were very happy to see him, after his one and a half years of absence.

Other news from the campuses is briefly described below:

LP Section: The children enjoyed reaping the rice they had planted before the Onam holidays. They made payasam to mark the occasion.

Wishing to emulate the fourth standard students, the first through third standard students created individual projects and held an exhibition.

The fourth standard recently exhibited projects on various means of transportation, including models of ships and buses.

UP Section: In October, the UP students celebrated Space Week, where they researched and made models of various space-related topics. The week

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culminated in the students' presentation of their work. Weekly, the children now also enthusiastically participate in Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) sessions. These include activities such as art, electronics, clay sculpting and woodwork. After returning from the Onam holidays, all of the children were busy researching and making their Expo projects. Teachers followed the Four Basic Aims in helping the children with their projects and performances. In conjunction with the Training Department, special development sessions were given on how to evolve as teachers to meet the changing factors shaping the children's world. (For details, see **TRAINING WORKSHOPS** article.)

HS and Plus Two

Section: This term the students worked to prepare their Expo projects and Graduation Programme performances. (For details, see **PREPARATION FOR EXPO DEVELOPS**



IMPORTANT QUALITIES AND SKILLS article.) The Monthly Programmes were used to practice for the upcoming events. As usual, several guests were invited to Speakers' Corner to give presentations. Dr. Manik Hiranandani, also a parent, came and spoke about the field of medicine, and acupuncture in particular. Dr. Chandrabhas Narayana, from the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bangalore, gave a presentation on the topic of nanotechnology. Alumnus Sri Girish Ravi shared his experiences of engineering college and the workplace. (For details, see **WHERE ARE THEY NOW** article.) Parent and communications expert Sri G. Balachandran gave a two-day session



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before the Expo, on personality development and presentation-making. In addition to the guest speakers, the students also had the opportunity to make and deliver speeches, which were heard and later critiqued by a panel of teachers.

The eighth through tenth standard students went on a study tour to Thiruvananthapuram to visit Tata Consultancy Services, located within Technopark. They also visited exhibits in the Science and Technology Museum, and the Planetarium, located within the compound.

PREPARATION FOR EXPO

The results of a recent survey of India's top schools, conducted jointly by Wipro Applying Thought in Schools and Educational Initiatives, reveal that:

- *Students appear to be learning mechanically, rather than truly understanding concepts;*
- *Students perform exceedingly well only where the answers can be mugged up from textbooks, showing a disproportionate and unhealthy bias towards rote learning; and*
- *Students slot learning into artificial compartments, and their ability to apply what they learned to real-life situations—essential for competence building—is extremely poor.*

Dr. K Subramanian, professor at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Mumbai, and part of the expert panel which analysed the survey results, says: "It's clear from the survey that our top schools have very unsatisfactory learning. The children are not using their minds, and there is something that is putting their thinking and analytical abilities off. The exclusive focus on high marks actually

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produces this kind of learning and responses, and affects the students all the way down to what the teacher chooses to stress in the class. Ultimately, the goal of education is not to cover the syllabus, but to uncover knowledge, and that is yet to happen.”



Looking at the “ultimate goal of education,” as stated so simply and eloquently by Dr. K Subramanian, an occasion for students to “uncover knowledge” can be provided by the preparations for Expo at Sri Atmananda Memorial School. During these, the role of the

KPM teacher is one of facilitator, assisting and removing obstacles for the student, who

- explores unknown fields
- comprehends what he encounters
- formulates his ideas
- plans the implementation of his project
- organizes input, ideas, and materials
- applies what he has learned from his teachers, his life including his Expo projects of previous years, and a variety of other resources
- researches
- analyzes and integrates all the input and information he comes upon
- solves problems of a cognitive as well as a social and personal nature
- concentrates for days on a project to achieve the outcome he desires
- uses imagination and creativity to find solutions to problems encountered along the way

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- learns to work and cooperate with other members of a team
- develops the ability to communicate ideas to his classmates, his teachers and the Expo visitors



With the resolve to ensure that the students receive the maximum benefit from their Expo experience, this year the Teacher Development department reinforced teachers'

application of the Four Basic Aims of a KPM teacher during their Expo work with the students. The teachers remarked that the Expo preparations provide a gateway for building closer relationships with the students; during Expo time, a High School teacher can go completely into the student's world, guiding her through her interests—as opposed to asking the student to follow him into his world, as is often the case in the classroom, with syllabus constraints. The teachers were also urged to join in the student's world and interests wholeheartedly. For example, when the student wanted to present a Sound and Light show based on the lives of famous personalities, the teacher became involved in the details of the student's idea and assisted the student in realizing his vision. Likewise when the student expressed a

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fascination for a destructive personality, the teacher sought to understand what that fascination was based on. Because of the teacher's genuine willingness to join in his project and understand him, the student, in turn, was more open to the teacher's guidance in seeing what was at the root of that particular fascination and finding a positive role model for the quality he admired.

Preparations for Expo also provide an excellent opportunity for teachers to examine and reflect upon the developmental needs of each student, encouraging him to develop those qualities and skills he most needs. For example, for a student who lacked motivation in his studies, a teacher singled out a skill the student has, and repeated praise and encouragement to bring that skill forward in the student's Expo project. Inspired after preparing and

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presenting his Expo project to others, the student is now applying this new-found confidence to other areas of his schooling.



One teacher, who worked with all the boys of a class on making a documentary film, was able to assist them in welcoming the girls' efforts and participation in the project. The teacher was also given an opportunity to gently guide the students towards an appreciation of the life of the working class, which they portrayed with great dignity in their film about a nearby quarry.

As the Expo Coordinator expressed, "They have all the ideas. What they need from us is our full support, whether it is by helping them carry bricks up a hill, coordinating between staff of different campuses to get the necessary equipment, assisting them in finding resource material online, introducing relevant material as they work, bringing a plastic tarp from one's own backyard, or simply by staying with them after school hours as they work to



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refine and complete their projects. Once they feel our unconditional support, they take off and are so motivated, hardworking and inspired. You can really see where a student's interest lies through his Expo projects. Many develop and improve on ideas from year to year.”

In applying the Four Basic Aims of a KPM Teacher while assisting students in their Expo preparations, teachers can help students uncover their knowledge, by developing important skills and qualities such as a deep understanding of concepts, in applying their learning to a real-life situation.

TEACHER EVALUATION

Each year, on all three campuses of the school, teachers and managers meet individually to discuss each teacher's application of the Four Basic Aims of the KPM Teacher. In half-hour sessions, teachers receive a written evaluation of their performance in each of four areas: 1) Making a relationship of trust with the children, 2) Wholeheartedly joining in their activities, 3) Having an awareness of the children's needs and interests and 4) Being able to introduce the skills, qualities and syllabus topics the children need, according to their liking and interests.

Prior to the sessions, each teacher fills out a self-assessment form, evaluating his or her performance in these four basic areas. At the same time, the relevant Campus Heads fill out a similar evaluation form for each teacher. At the evaluation sessions, the management evaluation and the teacher's self-evaluation are considered side by side. This process creates a dialogue between teachers and management and identifies the teacher's strengths as well as areas for him or her to work on. It also helps firstly the teacher—in focusing on and excelling in each of the Four Basic Aims; and secondly the management—in identifying what assistance and support the teacher needs, as well as in



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monitoring trends to find out on which areas the Teacher Development Programme needs to focus.

Teachers also have the opportunity to make their own suggestions and requests. For example, in the High School, teachers requested a career options session, to give them a strong basis for advising the children in their career plans. Teachers at the Lower Primary discussed strengthening the campus' science and math curricula, while Upper Primary teachers requested development sessions on how to deal with social issues among the children.

Teacher evaluations, which occupy several weeks of the school schedule, generate a wealth of ideas, provide appropriate feedback for teachers, and present a meaningful opportunity for a more formal interaction between managers and teachers. They are an important part of the ongoing efforts to help the teachers apply the Four Basic Aims, and to improve the application of the KPM Approach to Children at the School.

AVEF PLEDGE PROGRAMME

As part of the reorganization of the AVEF Fundraising Department, AVEF is implementing a new Pledge Programme. The AVEF Pledge Programme provides well-wishers with an opportunity to participate in the continuing growth of the KPM Approach to Children and to contribute to the benefits brought to children throughout the world. The aims of the Pledge Programme are:

- to meet the need of supporting the educational costs of the 180 children attending Sri Atmananda Memorial School, the model school for the KPM Approach to Children, and

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- to broaden our impact on children throughout the world, by financing the expansion of AVEF training programmes, educational workshops, teaching materials, web resources and conferences.

Currently, School tuition fees—set at levels appropriate to local standards—cover approximately fifty percent of the total educational cost, with the balance coming from private and institutional charitable donations. By participating in the AVEF Pledge Programme, well-wishers will be supporting the education of children in the model school, and can thereby have a lasting impact on the lives of children and the application of the KPM Approach to Children worldwide.

For further details about the AVEF Pledge Programme, please visit the Pledge Programme page on our site at

<http://www.kpmapproach.org/index.php?/pages/282>

FAREWELL TO MR. SURENDRAN BABU



On Friday, September 29th, School management, teachers and staff gathered at the Lower Primary for a farewell sendoff to express their appreciation for Mr. Surendran Babu's services in the School. Mr. Babu had been with Sri Atmananda Memorial School since 1995. Throughout those many years, he provided support for the School by typing official letters and spending hours photocopying documents for the school management, teachers and children. His is an honoured position, because he is the first "retiree" of the School.



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The farewell opened with the School Prayer. Many people extended their thanks to Mr. Babu, including Joint Secretary Mrs. Suzanne Buckley, on behalf of the Principal, and the Canteen Manager, Mr. Unnikrishna Pillai. One teacher, Mrs. Nisha G. Pillai, said that though Babu Sar ran the machines, he was more than just a machine in our School. People will remember all the years that he worked with us, diligently copying and preparing materials for classes and meetings. Though there are procedures outlined for photocopies, Babu Sar was always willing to carry out an “emergency” order. Office staff member, Mrs. Syamala Devi, remarked on his patience.

“There is not one dark spot in our minds when we think back on Babu Sar,” teacher Mr. Unnikrishna Pillai, said. He remarked how Mr. Babu never appeared to be cross or angry when he was handed a large stack of last-minute photocopying. He always did his best to ensure that materials were available when needed.

Mr. Surendran Babu then gave a short speech that traced the path of his career. His first post was as a shop assistant; he later ran a tuition school, and finally became a part of Sri Atmananda Memorial School. He thanked everyone present.

The farewell concluded with a song on “Memories,” rendered by teacher Mr. Vidhu S. We wish Mr. Surendran Babu all the best in his years of retirement. He will always have a place in the School.