

**PERFORMANCE AND SELF: SCHOOLING
BEYOND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN THE
VALLEY SCHOOL, BENGALURU**

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Performance and Self: Schooling Beyond Academic Achievement in The Valley School,

Bengaluru

-Simran Gupta

The function of education is to build a mode of learning and the ability to observe and listen. The use of the senses to understand the “hidden self” is of utmost significance. It is through the ‘hidden self’ that Krishnamurti views the growth of freedom in an individual as for him, “there can be no freedom as long as you are merely trying to become somebody, or imitate a noble example.” (Krishnamurti 1970)

Performance is understood as the ability of an individual to meet expectations and in wider setting to achieve a goal and practicing a constant assessment of ‘self’ in order to fit in social world. An individual starts performing right from a tender age via one’s schooling. Thus education starts its role in shaping and preparing an individual for freedom, ability to learn or memorising academic syllabi along with feeling of competition and comparison?

I will substantiate the answer to this through my schooling, I was trained to memorise and reproduce mechanically - the entire syllabus, tested via examination. Performance of the student was judged and marked upon these scores and enclosed in report cards. During this whole, shine academically marathon I was in an on-going performance to become or mould myself according to what the social world expected a student to be. I consider my experience of schooling as a typical example of social stages which require students to put up a ‘front’ and manage their ‘impression’ carefully in order to fit into society: through fitting into the pre-defined roles that the school as an important agency of socialisation establishes. This narrow focus of education during my own schooling substantiated my research interest in The Valley School.

Drawing from Krishnamurti’s ideas of self-enquiry, self-observation relating to the very idea of transformation in the human being, through my paper will analyse how a certain development of the idea of the self takes place through the institution of education. I seek to understand an individual’s performance in the school space(s) and the development of their self. I also, attempt an understanding of a different definition of performance, one that is detached from the traditional ideas of academic achievement, competition and struggle.

In the social world, every human being performs and plays a role (Goffman:1990,10). He understood human beings and their actions by conceptualising them as actors, performing on a 'social stage' and was actively strived to create an impression on the audience. Working on the principles of Krishnamurti, The Valley School is the place where one learns about the totality and wholeness of life. "It is the place where both the teacher and the taught explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their behaviour"¹. This paper attempts to unravel and understand the everyday performance and roles of students as well as teachers, in the backdrop of the distinct culture² of education at The Valley School, Bengaluru. This paper will also examine how the intent the school, following J. Krishnamurti's educational thought, helps students to construct a mind of free will.

The Valley School, started in 1978 is affiliated to the Krishnamurti Foundation of India. The form, content and structure of the school are established on the educational thought of its founder, J. Krishnamurti. It has a campus that extends over 103 acres of land. This school provides its services to 300-350 students who are divided into three segments; junior, middle and senior school. Following a day boarding system up to class Xth, the school then includes the students of standard XI and XII as part of their full time board system. The school is affiliated to the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE), offering courses leading to the ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education) examination on completing class X, and a course leading to the ISC (Indian School Certificate) Examination at the end of class XII. Interestingly, students from standard I to standard VIII are not evaluated on the basis of fixed examinations but are consistently observed in their everyday activities and monthly assessments are conducted as well.

It is important to understand that the valley school is not an alternative school or a bubble. It is based upon the Krishnamurti's belief, which he often quoted in his public talks and dialogic interactions with students, you can't run away from society and you can't be off society.

Method

¹ As elucidated on website of the School – thevalleyschool.info.

² A school situated far away from city in the wilderness which does not have any authoritarian relationship or hierarchy, establishing a bond of trust within teachers and students. Here experiential learning is the core intent along with this school is affiliated to ICSE board and conducts exams from 9th grade onwards. Therefore valley school is not a conventional or a bubble. Hence, I term it as distinct culture of education.

This research was conducted over a span of six weeks in the premises of The Valley School, Bengaluru. The first week was spent familiarising myself with the various spaces in the campus and attempts were made at rapport formation with teachers, students and the administrative staff of the school. Dining hall and Ragi breaks played an imperative role in allowing me to form strong rapport with everyone, specifically the students, given many opportunities for informal discussions. Initially my research was to focus on mixed age groups³ in the middle school, however, from the academic year 2019-2020, mixed age groups were dissolved in the middle school. I therefore had to expand my focus, to include the junior school as well where the very idea of vertical age group sustained. In the following weeks, I attended classes in the middle school and spent considerable time with the students by attending their culture classes⁴ on every Friday and English and Social Studies classes during the entire week.

To unravel these aspects within The Valley School, I used both the participant and non-participant methods of observations and supplemented them with 25-30 informal and semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and the alumnae. Non-participant observation included observing different spaces like assembly space, dining hall, both the junior and the middle school, sports field, along with assemblies and the dining hall routine. Participation in discussions during circle time, English, Social science and culture classes, land care⁵ work along with meals shared with teachers constitute the data of the participant observation conducted. I chose different spaces, where I could observe day to day, academic, co-curricular performances within school.

The School ‘Space’

The geographical and physical location of The Valley School is in sync with its intent; it is believed that academic excellence is absolutely necessary but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the student explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge but also their own thinking and their behaviour. From this they begin to discover their own conditioning and how it distorts thinking. In this school it is the responsibility of the teacher to sustain with the student, carefully explore into his/her conditioning and thus end it.

³ The children’s ages range from 7-9 years, making it a group of classes 2nd, 3rd, 4th.

⁴ These classes were conducted by a teacher specially assigned for it who through dialogues or group activities helps students to think, reflect and feel more.

⁵ Planting small samplings and watering plants and trees.

Fear is what prevents the flowering of the mind, the flowering of goodness. Most of us learn through fear. Fear is the essence of authority and obedience (Krishnamurti:1974). This very essence of authority is also one of the catalyst element in entire schooling which hinders the potential of an individual's growth. Authority is used as a tool or as a means to achieve certain ends, across the spectrum of the schooling system (Chaudhary: 2018,184). In contrast to this, the Valley school seeks to understand the possibility of something beyond knowledge, which brings natural psychological revolution and from this comes inevitably a totally different order in human relationship.

Unlike other schools located in concrete, urban jungles, The Valley School through its geographical and physical location tries to reduce the pressure exerted upon a child and prepares him/her for acting in the outer world. It tries to uplift the backstage role of the child more than the front that the child maintains by cultivating a relaxing and soothing environment where he/she can think freely .

How does a mind of free will function and is able to make decisions for him/her reflected in two spaces that grabbed my attention when I initially entered the field- it was mahasagar⁶ and dining hall⁷.

Mahasagar: common school assembly and senior school assembly are conducted here. Students themselves gather in the mahasagar, exactly at 8:10 a.m and sit in a circular pattern right one after another. Senior students take the lead and conduct the assembly without any interference of the teachers. Surprisingly, here the teachers participate with the students informally. This informal nature of relationship helps us to understand human to human relationship(s) rather than those of authority, control and force. Uniqueness of this act is more observable on Monday mornings specifically, when all the week boarders join the school back after a weekend getaway to the city and buses are also arrive in the school with students coming from their homes. Since the students are already in sync with the pattern; they therefore silently join the assembly and starts singing along. Teachers see this pattern as a way of life and say:

“We are just facilitators here; we do not see it as a ‘job of a teacher’ because we are here to create an environment and space for them where learning happens on its own and among their peers as well” (Source: an interview conducted with teacher).

⁶ A huge, open shed with covered roof made of bamboo and thatch.

⁷ It contain low tables for the placement of food and bamboo mats spread on the floor to sit.

Dining Hall: A space which has an environment of informal interactions between students and teachers. It has a well practiced structure of praying before the lunch and post meal. Both students and teachers wash their plates themselves along with cleaning duties distributed among students evenly. *Prima facie*, the division looks like a strict disciplinary act since it already has set rules. However, on further observation it emerged as a unique illustration to understand sibling behaviour at the school. The senior school children help the junior and middle school children to decide their duty rosters and further help them to imbibe it as a way of life.

During initial conversations with students I received responses like: “Doing everything appropriate which falls under line, a line which I have to choose for myself being sensitive enough towards nature, space discipline, my teachers and my peers. This place gives me freedom and flexibility but freedom is not merely making choice. For instance: I do not want to do the cleaning today because I am tired. I can do this for maybe a day or two but due to my this behaviour my juniors will suffer and because they would have to wait for food and do my share of cleaning as well. It will ultimately lead to disorder and chaos. Freedom is not comfort but in being sensitive enough towards each others feeling” (Source: an interview conducted with a senior student).

Such a space in Valley, allows personal and deeper interactions with students which enables teachers to connect with students at an emotional rather than an authoritative/position level.

The Junior School: Seed Sown and Grown

A rocky path from right of the left hand corner of the dining hall leads to the junior school wherein 6 hut like structures are present for six groups of students - standard II, III and IV respectively. Each group has approximately 16-18 students along with one group teacher and one support teacher. The names of the groups in the junior school are synonyms of Earth: *Bhuvi, Ila, Prithvi, Oorja, Mahi and Medhini*. Each teacher in the junior school spends three years with every student until they go to the middle school, which gives them a longer duration to assess, observe and interact with the students at a more deeper and personal level. The teachers in the junior school do not approach the students from a place of authority but instead attempt to cultivate a deep and strong relationship of trust, empathy and humility with them. They also actively seek to acknowledge the pace of the student to avoid any sort of pressure.

The junior school has an integrated approach, it is premised on the ideas of experiential and hands-on learning in addition to academic knowledge. The role of nature in the life of the

student is duly taken into consideration within the junior school. It is believed that amongst the wilderness, the child can freely explore, reflect and introspect.

Block Periods

Block periods in the junior school are an hour long for any of the three subjects: Maths, English or Environmental Science. Here the pedagogy is set in such a way that it enables the teachers to have a dialogue with the students and provides the teacher the necessary space to make certain modifications in the curriculum. During such periods, students are also taken on walks to cultivate relationship with nature.

Right after the lunch break, students in junior school take a lot of time to settle in their classrooms. Therefore the group teacher sometimes prefer to take the students on the walk during block periods and then come back to the class and relate the respective core subject. For example, one day group teacher of *prithvi* planned a walk for all of them.

Teacher: We will form a line and will start for today's silent walk to observe trees.

Students: okay, aunty. (They formed the line and start walking)

During the walk students are looking at the dried leaves, some of them are looking up to observe leaves, few of them are touching the bark of the tree and while returning back few students are carrying fallen small branches of trees and flowers.

Teacher: now, we've come back and today we'll be writing a free verse.

Student: what is a free verse aunty?

Teacher: free verse is slightly different from the poem it has no rules, one can write freely. We'll write about trees. Did you all observe carefully?

Students: (in a collective voice) yes aunty.

Teacher: what should be the title?

Student: tree story!

They collectively write a poem:

Trees trees trees

Trees have many colourful leaves.

They have big brown branches.

Swaying in the breeze

Many beautiful flowers blossom on the branches.

Teacher: now, try to complete it on your own but I am here for help as well.

After a while, the teacher starts going from one table to another, to see if anyone needs any assistance. Meanwhile even the students of standard IV are helping the students of standard II like their elder siblings. The idea of mixed age groups was introduced in 1997 by a group of teachers who believed in the philosophy of J. Krishnamurti and understood the school's intent. "It was believed that just like a family does not have members of similar age group but still has the feeling of togetherness, similarly a space must be created and nurtured where children of different age groups could sit together and learn at their 'own pace'" (source: an interview with a retired teacher, founding member of mixed age group).

Here, this whole set up of mixed age group in the junior school helps to create a safe space, where the teacher attempts to shed off her 'front' stage role (Goffman: 1990, 15). Here front is her role when she is supposed to act as an authoritative figure exercising pedagogic authority (Bourdieu and Passeron: 1977, 20) and is supposed to train the students in cognitive skills but rather acts like a friend. She remains close to her true self and her performance leads to building of an environment where students can be who they are, where students can talk and figure out how they feel because of the dialogue and space provided.

"if I ever felt that I was burdened up and unable to take lessons in block periods, I immediately discussed it with the principal and he suggested that I need to adopt flexibility in my approach. For instance, a walk during Math period could be also turned fruitful. I didn't receive any order or feared from authority because it has no place in Valley" (an interview of a group teacher).

Teachers in Valley are free of that fear and a great deal of freedom and trust is showed on them, with the firm belief that they would uphold their integrity (Chaudhary: 2018, 190). Teachers are at ease and that is reflected in the ways the classes are conducted and also in the attitude of the teacher when a student seeks help from them or shares a heart to heart conversation.

Circle Time

During this time, the group teacher asks students to sit in a circle. Here she attempts to create a space for discussion and dialogue. The educators use this to develop certain qualities like empathy, self-acceptance, cooperation, sensitivity, and reciprocity.

For instance, during one of the circle time the teacher tries to resolve the issues the students were facing amongst themselves:

Teacher: *Bhuv* why didn't you walk quietly to the art village today?

students kept looking at the mat or here and there.

Teacher: you all have to answer my question only then I'll be able to understand that why it was necessary to talk?

Student of the IInd standard: aunty! We were walking slow as we wanted to see butterflies on the way to art village.

Teacher: well, that's great. But remember we can't observe butterflies if we aren't quiet?

Student: yes! Aunty, but we were little slower than others so, they (older children) were constantly asking us to move fast.

Teacher: * looked at the students of standard IV* were you all asking them to walk fast?

Student of the IVth standard: yes aunty! Why not? We all were late for the art village also; *prithivis* and *ilas* already reached the art village.

Teacher: so, why did it bother you?

Student of the IVth standard: because *bhuv* were left behind.

Teacher: Do you know? In order to keep up your pace with them, you missed out on a lot! You were so self-concerned to attain the goal due to the feeling of competition in your mind.

Student: is it wrong to do so?

Teacher: there is nothing wrong or right but you did this in order to perform better than others rather reaching art village on time because art teacher must have been waiting for you all.

Students: (all agree and nod their heads)

The teacher rather than playing an authoritative role or commanding role, plays an informal role as friend . She pacifies students when some of them share their personal grievances because of the trust element between them.

By using the circle time, the teacher explains that it was important to be sensitive towards their classmates and that there was no need to compete with the other group. The teacher while interacting with the students at a more personal and deeper level showed them how the mind becomes dull, when it is occupied only with competition and the struggle to be ahead. This prepares student to be confident about their thoughts and not to feel pressurised to put up a ‘front’.

The Middle School-Comparison, Competition, Fear

Adjacent to the junior school is the middle school in the premises of The Valley School. Both the schools are separated by a basketball court. Earlier the middle schools used to follow the vertical age group system but from the academic year of 2019-2020 they adopted the horizontal classes system with the standards being identified as standards Vth, VIth and VIIth respectively.

Moving beyond the ideas of authority, hierarchy, fear and authority, the teachers in the middle school similar to junior school attempt to build, create and cultivate an environment of care, love, empathy and trust which helps children in getting involved with the teachers at a more personal and deeper level by having conversations and addressing their curiosities and also address problem of isolation created by horizontal set up. Interestingly, salutations within the middle school are not confined only to ‘Sir’ or ‘Ma’am’, the students call their teachers by their first names and even by their nick names or refer to them as Aunties and Uncles. Teachers within the middle school do not approach students from the place of authority and hierarchy but rather participate and interact with the children.

Children in the middle school are taught to question themselves while knowing the limitations of the outside world. Therefore I chose VII grade as the main focus because of convenient sampling, along with their academic classes of Social science and English, I also observed their culture classes, sports periods and few art village interactions.

English Class and Social Studies Class

In this section I attempted to understand how curriculum is transacted in middle school. To elucidate this, I’ll be drawing from one of the classes that I observed of 7th grade. So, during

one of the English class students came late to the class after games period and were bit noisy as they were excited about the good match they had. Even after constant reminders by the teacher, the students still didn't maintain silence. Here she shed her 'front' and carried her backstage role, more relaxed and closer to being herself. She did this by not giving punishments to students or lecturing them on how and why they should be on time. Instead she plans to have a conversation or group discussion where she'll surely come across the reason that what goes inside a child's head that they lose track of time. Through this activity she'll also encourage voicing out opinion and listening skills among students.

Teacher: what helps you to focus better and enables you to learn?

Student: are we again doing a culture class, aunty?

Teacher: no, this is absolutely an English class and this is a situation given to you, also situation of our class. So through sentence formation you'll be answering me not just in one word. Okay? So, first table you start.

Student 1: a clutter free space helps me focussing better in class.

Student 2: classroom needs to be organised more like no books on the table will surely help me to focus better.

Student 3: listening to other's point of view.

Student 4: a quiet class helps me to focus better.

Teacher: so, what comes in the way of learning?

Students started answering together

Some of the responses: chatting with other friends, resistance to ask questions in class, a noisy class, cross conversation across the tables etc. These responses helped students understand their own class situations and the teacher was successful by making them realise through a discussion and later on had a dialogue about how the classroom is a space for learning. The teacher did not maintain her authority, rather performs with more relaxation which put children at more ease and element of fear is not to be seen at all. Here, teacher acts as the facilitator and creates a safe space for self-realization which helps students in having a relationship with teacher not as position to position but more humanitarian; where they trust their teachers with their feelings which will be taken into account and action will be implemented for the same.

Similar approach is also carried out at ⁸Prakriya Green Wisdom School, they believe that years of middle school are the bridge years of life. At this age, children in Middle school are with high energy, high curiosity and stop interacting among each other. These are markers of this age. Therefore an active learning approach is followed where teachers just do not try to establish only academic environment of exactness and rote learning rather constructs an environment of regular practice of knowledge, habit formation and skill building.

Teachers acting as facilitators can be also seen at ⁹Mirambika: A free Progress School, where teachers are ‘Diyas’, and they innovatively help students to understand their responsibilities through activities or project works planned in advance instead of performing an authoritative role. This is similar to role played by the teachers at The Valley School.

Culture Class

Both groups of 7th grade have separate culture classes but activities that take place are always on similar lines with both the groups. Culture classes take place in middle school’s Audio Visual room.

Teacher asks everyone to wait for 5 minutes as she wants to set up a projector to show them a film. The film is about inclusion and acceptance: a story of small mouse with unusually big ears in a pet shop but no one buys him, instead boys make fun of him and his big ears but he does not lose hope throughout. He does everything possible to grab the attention of every buyer and he catches the attention of a boy who wears a pair of headphones. Boy looks at him; mouse waves with his both ears. Boy was overwhelmed and he removes his headphones too. They both had unusually big ears, both went happily home. THE END.

The teacher asks the students what they understand.

Student: yes, it was so simple! The boy chose the mouse because he looked similar to him.

Student: and others were making fun of him because he was not like them.

Teacher: yes, in our daily lives we tend to make fun or tease, those who are different from us and in schools we may not include them in our group.

⁸ Prakriya Green Wisdom School is a school in Bengaluru, started in 1999. The school’s philosophy is based upon nature and natural growth.

⁹ Mirambika- Free Progress School, New Delhi established in 1981. The school runs on the educational thought of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (sibia 2006).

Student: yeah, because we have nothing in common so, how are we supposed to form groups or friends with somebody who is not like us?

Teacher: okay, let's do an activity divide yourself into a group of three or four on the basis of your likes or dislikes. Also, make mix groups of girls and boys.

(Class suddenly becomes noisy; students who were even sitting far started asking questions among each other, for example, what is your favourite sport? Do you play basket ball?)

Teacher: okay! So, group wise you tell me, there are four groups but two are still left out. Why are you both not part of any group?

Both the students: we don't match with anyone and nobody included us also.

Teacher: did you even try? (Students make no eye contact to her) I'll come back to you. Now please define your groups.

Group 1: with 5 students (all girls), we all like reading books and playing basketball.

Group 2 with 5 students (mix group). We all like Guns&Roses(band) and basketball.

Group 3 with 4 students (mix group), we all like art and basketball.

Group 4 with 3 students (all boys), we all like football and cycling.

Teacher: just pause and look around you. Look at the groups that you have formed. Your groups include those classmates with whom you haven't interacted/have interacted very less. You have even formed mixed groups constituting both girls and boys but in your free time or games period you think: what is the need to team up together? My children, this happens because you think they are different and you already created an 'image' of them. This happens due to lack of communication and because of our preconceived notions and stereotypes. This results in exclusion.

(all the students are quiet and start mumbling something)

Teacher: sorry! Time is up, In the next class we'll discuss what actually happens to the person who has been excluded for very long.

Culture classes provide a flexible space where one learns to observe the world not from a particular point of view or conclusion because after every activity a dialogue session takes

place. The purpose of these classes are to inculcate the emotional aspect along with cognitive aspect of learning and how these two are inseparable of each other. Such kind of conducive environment is created by the educator as she encourages sharing of ideas by everyone in the class through which a child learns emotionality and acceptability.

According to Krishnamurti, “the function of teachers is to educate not only the partial mind but the totality of the mind; to educate students so that they do not get caught in the little whirlpool of existence but lives in the whole river of life” (Krishnamurti 1974:38).

Therefore, here the teacher instills awareness about exclusion and inclusion which creates a safe space for students where they can share their views and perform without any hesitation or element of fear. They sit in groups and engage in dialogic interaction not only with their peers but with their teachers too.

I found cultural classes of Valley School similar to the intent of ¹⁰Shibhumi School. Shibhumi emphasises the concern of education is the deepening and maturing of attention and sensitivity. As a child at this stage is encouraged to take greater responsibility for his/her behaviour and other activities. Culture classes of Valley also tries to instill a dialogic environment full of sensitivity, emotionality and responsibility.

Sports Field: Participation, Harmony

Through this section, I will try to illustrate how Games/Sports at Valley are not considered as a co-curricular activity or an extra activity which can be opted by a few. It's a fixed part of curriculum. So that when students pass out of school they are not just about skills, knowledge, efficiency or passing examination. In other words they perform with sensitivity, bereft of competition without managing their impressions or self according to social world.

The sports field in my personal experience of schooling and subjectivity meant rigorous energy and all about feeling competitive towards another team and to win was the only goal.

Compare this to what a student of the Valley said after losing a football match - It's human behaviour but if I don't win then also I am fine because it's about doing things together rather than get hurt or feel sad about losing the game. Its all about pure joy of playing. Winning is fine, if I win? I'll obviously be happy, a natural emotion.

¹⁰ Shibhumi , Bangalore rural was established in 1928. It is based upon educational thought of J. Krishnamurti.

In Valley School, performance is not based upon securing first position or achieving medals or any quantitative method to mark one's image as a winner or loser in front of others or audience. Here, performance is not one's management of impression (Goffman:1990) he/she is leaving on others rather he/she performs to participate in every new venture. This practice of Valley school has enabled a divorce between sports and competition.

This is ensured by the teachers – let me illustrate this by another exercise of long jump.

Everyone reaches the football ground and they see that the teacher has already arranged an area for long jump, a long jump pit. Then he asked all the students to form a line and one by one come and jump. Students formed a line but they have some interesting conversation amongst themselves.

Student 1: you'll see today I am going to jump better than last time.

Student 2: yeah, yeah! Good for you, anyway we all know who is going to be the best.

Student 3: (one who is really good at sports) hey guys! Listen, all of us can do it. Instead we discuss how I am going to jump let's get her, here. She is again sitting alone.

Student 1: yes! It's been 20 days that she has joined but never volunteers.

Student 2: maybe because she feels what if she is unable to jump and falls down?

Student 4: let's start guys! Maybe she'll join after seeing us enjoying.

Meanwhile students are having their own conversations of how to include her, sports teacher notices this too and asks her to get up and join everyone. She resists but with constant encouragement of the teacher and as well as students, she tries to jump and she jumps really well. All the students surround her and start applauding for her, some are cheering for her, and some patting her back. Sports teacher asks everybody to form the line and start jumping again.

Sports teacher: you did really well! (Talked to her when everyone was busy forming line)

Student: *smiled* I'll improve.

“A child can develop to her fullest capacity only in an atmosphere that is devoid of fear and authority” (Krishnamurti: 2018).

The girl who did not want to jump decided to jump because of the constant encouragement of sports teacher and her classmates. She was not only the one who was performing but each and everyone around her were performing as well. These performances were a part and parcel of each other's performances; teacher is performing by providing a relaxing and a hesitant free space for her and her classmates are performing by showing their trust in her that she can do it rather than discouraging her.

A Rocky Road

Like any other day school, the children from The Valley School go back to their home in the city. How ironically, a program which was being developed with a vision of giving children a space bereft of fear, authority, and comparison turned out be insensitive in nature since teachers found it difficult. This very return to their homes brings forth new challenges and issues. Since the children leave the sanctified and pure space of the school to return back to their families in the city, it makes it difficult for them to adjust which leads to compatibility issues between the environment of the school and the culture within the city.

“Since, the outside culture and influences differ from the simplistic culture of the school, the school finds it difficult to balance these two forces. This was also one of the reasons why the middle school dropped the mixed age group system as it was not able to manage the very ill effects of outside environment even when the mixed-age group was presumed to be the ideal way to enhance a child's performance and make learning joyful without any feeling of pressure and has an approach of inclusion”(a standard response during all the interviews conducted with teachers at the junior, middle, and senior school).

However, the implementation of horizontal set up over mixed age groups brought forth different sets of issues and set a different narrative within the school of how mixed age group had lost its essence in the middle school due to the conflicts it brought under the light. It is to address the growing emotional needs of students, specifically of those who were about to enter puberty.

My conversations with the teachers from the senior school substantiated this: “without a doubt mixed age group system is best for holistic growth but there is lack of conviction on the part of teachers and they have not been able to cope up with classroom teaching as it is difficult to address certain science class questions of twelve year old in front of a ten year old”

On the other hand, middle school teachers had a collective response for adopting the horizontal class structure: “We have to drop the mixed age group from middle school because of the growing demands from parents that their children should be doing something more engaging with textbooks due to present day's competitive education (Source: an interview with middle school teacher).

I had an informal conversation with a 7th grade student during my observation. Interestingly, I found that apart from not been able to address emotional needs and coping with syllabus, there were also some other unintended consequences of mixed age group which the school did not see coming.

Student: All the aunty and uncle think that they know every thing but they do not, they may be friendly with some other children or know them very well but that does not mean that they what is going in their heads.

Me: Why do you say that? Are they difficult to approach or you are fearful in sharing your details?

Student: No no, it isn't about them after all they are teachers and will try to solve it. So, the class can function very smoothly. But rest of the days we all are on our own.

Me: Why is that a problem? You all are together since three years.

Student: Yes, and this is why everyone knows each other's flaws and can use against each other or bully.

Me: Bully? You mean bullying? Here on school campus?

Student: (hesitant first) then spoke: You have to promise me that you will not tell this to aunty... I have been bullied too when I was in 5th grade. Over my clothes and hairbands. I was wearing cartoon character printed tshirt on the first few weeks of middle school and everyone made fun of me.

Me: But isn't it school's policy that you can wear anything you are comfortable in?

Student: Yeah, but to fit in a class, we've to keep up with the trend, or else you'll be cornered 7th grade will not let you be part of any group. Like I started wearing plain t-shirts. Although 6th graders were good help. And I miss them now, as I was friends with only them.

Me: Did you ever try to report this to teachers or went to the counsellor?

Student: No, I tried once but it turned against me because when aunties addressed them, they bullied me more. Especially in the school bus.

I discussed the same with the school counsellor during interviews conducted during her free period. She accepted:

“Yes, there were cases of bullying and teachers were unable to address the growing emotional needs of a 12 year old. This is the age when a child is stepping into teenage and goes through emotional and physical changes and finds himself/herself vulnerable. Also, with changing time, children are being exposed to a lot of things like violence, inequality, social media etc. since they go back home every day. So, when these children are unable to channelize their emotional energy, some turns insensitive towards young children, which is natural at this age”.

During some group interviews, some students accepted:

We miss the mixed age group a lot. We loved helping the 5th graders. Also, we miss our friends too much, but they are in 6th grade, and we do not sit in the same class now. We do not feel like playing or doing land care without them, as it is no more fun. However, if we look at it another way, academically we are more focused now.

Me: So, are you happy with horizontal set up?

Student: Ofcourse, I miss my friends, but for 5th grade, it is a sigh of relief. As, they will not be bullied anymore.

Few students felt isolated as their friends were still in 6th grade, but some also felt that it was right decision since they will not go through bullying and will perform better academically. I also observed certain patterns of isolation during group activities like land care session and art village, which also made few students little restricted in their performance during these classes. Whereas, students from 5th grade thought differently, especially during the time of cleaning and washing utensils since they had a lot of work.

Some common responses were that they felt the need to go back to junior school as mixed age group system was more relaxing whereas middle school has now become hectic. They now have to do a lot of homework, projects, et cetera.

To overcome all these obstacles teachers always planned their classes creatively to enhance an individual's performance. Aforementioned observation and interviews during academic classes, culture classes and sports field clearly signify that the school attempts to prepare a child for acting in the outer world by uplifting the backstage and creative roles. They tend to organise the school day in such a way that the child finds it easy to shed his/her front or the formal, academic self. All the stakeholders of the school have tried to cultivate an environment and 'stage' that aids the child to pull off the performative mask and gives him/her the leeway to be as he or she is in the real world.

Also, since the middle school is undergoing a transitional phase, from mixed age group to horizontal school it cannot be seen as a failure of one approach and the success of another. Teachers have tried their best to address and resolve some of the issues that students are dealing

with. Through constant dialogue in class, in the dining hall, in the sports field, and in every other space, teachers have tried to create a conducive environment where a child becomes more accepting of himself or herself.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to highlight how students and teachers perform and play their everyday roles without feeling any pressure on their social stage viz. the school. This is in tandem with the school's assertion on the pillars of J. Krishnamurti's philosophical ideas that attempt to cultivate a space beyond the ideas of authority, hierarchy, fear. Here, teachers are trying to create an environment of care, love, empathy, and trust which helps the children to get involved with teachers on a more personal and deeper level by having conversations and by addressing their curiosities.

The school environment has helped and aided the teachers to shed their front in front of their students and to remain flexible in their approach. By 'being at utmost ease' and by keeping in mind every students' performance due to the mixed age group system in junior school, the teachers have skillfully divided the syllabus in a way that it becomes creative, interactive and easy. This in turn helps the students from a very tender age to grow in an environment sans fear and authority.

Every space in the school is guided by dialogue, interactions, interpersonal relationships, sibling behaviour across the school, and informal relationship with teachers. It has tried to foster an environment where mutual learning capacity is built with peers involving with each other and has tried to cultivate a space where learning happens individually at one's own pace. By the time students reach the middle school they are confident about their view points and do not hesitate to share, discuss or question in the class since everyone is part and parcel of each other's performance.

However, the school due to its contrasting principles has had to deal with certain challenges. One of the major changes undergoing in the middle school is the adoption of the horizontal set up over the mixed age group. However, bullying emerged as one of the unintended consequences of the mixed age group in the last few years and threw a major roadblock to the teachers' bond with students (as highlighted above). Teachers have termed the middle school as a 'slippery platform' due to the teenage age that has led to growing emotional needs that need special attention. The teachers believe that this very transition will eventually fade away

once they children enter the senior school. But, haphazardly denouncing the middle school during its transitional phase is not the right approach because the teachers have tried to create a conducive environment and safe space by shedding their 'front'. Therefore the students are sans fear and at ease during their academic classes, culture classes, and even in spaces like the sports field .

Valley school highlights the performance of each and every space, each and every agent in the school. This performance is nothing but the overall performance of everyone which includes both cognitive and psychological aspects of growth, and not merely academic achievement. This distinct culture of education can lead an individual to perform better since they are bereft of fear, authority, comparison, judgement and competition. The school has thus given and has cultivated a space where experiential learning is everything and teachers are fully and equally involved in the very overall making of an individual. School will keep on creating and recreating its practices to reduce the outside influence driven through dialogic interactions by making one foresee its limitations and drawbacks.

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