

**UNDERSTANDING SENSITIVITY THROUGH CULTURAL
PRACTICES AT THE VALLEY SCHOOL, KFI**

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UNDERSTANDING SENSITIVITY THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICES AT THE VALLEY SCHOOL, KFI

By Anagha Ratheesh

Abstract

The study argues that idea of sensitivity at the Valley school is not an accidental outcome of J Krishnamurti's philosophy alone but is constructed through every day practices. The aim is to explore how the cultural practices of The Valley school, Bengaluru, under the KFI foundation foster sensitivity in students, hailing from Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophy on "Right Education". Furthermore it describes , how the other stakeholders of the school holistically construct the sensitive environment. Krishnamurti's understanding reveals that true intelligence requires attention to self, others, and also the natural world. The study also explores how the employment of certain pedagogical practices within the school culture contributes to the overall development of students and teachers.

Keywords

Sensitivity, school culture, pedagogy, nature, nonhierarchical, Krishnamurti philosophy.

Introduction

The aim of the KFI schools is to foster not just the skill set or knowledge in the textbooks, but also, from the very early stage, to build a comprehensive development of the individual in a holistic manner. The valley school, located in Bengaluru, the southern part of India, under the KFI foundation, also ensures schooling by Krishnamurti's vision of "right education". Cultivating a space for students who are not only competent for careers but also deeply self-aware, sensitive, responsible, and proficient in living in a competitive and divided society (Thapan, 2001). Krishnamurti's understanding of sensitivity lies in the following way: "*A human being who is aware of his environment, as well as aware of every movement of thought and feeling, who is a harmonious whole, is sensitive*"(Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 70), and not just a trait one should have within them.

Most mainstream schools tend to focus on aspects like academic results, efficiency, and

competition. So the question that arises in one's mind is how this kind of setup can provide a path for an individual to embody the aspect of sensitivity. The Valley school, which comes under the framework of alternative schooling, provides an understanding of how sensitivity can be cultivated in educational institutions that vary from mainstream schooling. This study tries to explore- how sensitivity as a philosophical idea becomes an embodied practice through everyday culture practices that take place in the educational space?

The study has tried to look at how educational institutions like The Valley school under KFI foundation have become a space for both students and teachers to cultivate sensitivity in a time where the motive of education is producing human machines or technically trained docile technicians rather than producing humans who can think for themselves (Nussbaum, 2009). Krishnamurti's philosophical idea of sensitivity leads to a pedagogical inquiry that this paper addresses, that how sensitivity is cultivated in the educational setup. The paper locates and describes the cultural practices at The Valley school intended to nurture sensitivity, which is examining the curriculum, co-curricular activities, school events and everyday practices. The role of teachers and other staff members in facilitating a sensitive atmosphere in the school. To investigate how these culture practices in the school impact the students' holistic development of empathy and self-inquiry. The study primarily draws on one month of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at The Valley School in June to July 2025, including participant observation, interviews, and informal conversations.

The Foundational Intent of Krishnamurti School

To understand the cultural practices of the Valley school, firstly, it is crucial to highlight Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophy on education. "All KFI schools share a common intent, but what is unique lies in how the intent is translated into action," said the director of the school. Krishnamurti's vision aimed to nurture an individual who is not moulded by conditioning and fear of society (Krishnamurti, J. 1974). The central purpose is to nurture minds that can reflect and learn through the process of inquiry. For this kind of vision, it is significant to provide a schooling free from fear, competition, rigid hierarchy, and explicit authority.

According to Krishnamurti (1974), the sensitivity is not restricted to emotional responsiveness but constitutes the individual's awareness about the inner self and the outer world. In *Krishnamurti on Education* (1974), J. Krishnamurti emphasizes that life becomes

meaningful only when lived with sensitivity, a sensitivity that transcends self-centred notion of beauty and expands into an openness to the world, the sky, the trees, a painting, the movement of birds, or the quality of human kindness. Beauty transcends the idea of self image among individuals and broadens the forms of beauty encompassing sensitivity towards the self, the nature, human bonds, art and all other kinds of entities in the society. If we take a look at the everyday practices happening in the valley, like the nature walks among the lower and middle schools, spaces like the dining hall, Art Village, and celebrations like the School's birthday, are certain intentional practices that help in cultivating sensitivity in the educational setup. The words of Krishnamurti put forth the essence of intelligence as sensitivity (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 71). The highest form of intelligence is about the individual's capacity to be highly sensitive. Sensitivity is cultivated not by making it a separate subject for students to learn; moreover, it should be attained throughout the schooling process by focusing on different aspects, like keen observation, self-inquiry, etc. The idea of competition and fear makes students conform to being mechanical and insensitive. Education needs to be provided to students and also teachers such that it creates an environment where there is a non-hierarchical relationship among teachers and students, the fear among students is absent, and not conforming to societal pressures (Krishnamurti, 1974).

The aim of developing sensitivity is found across all KFI schools, in Rishi Valley school located in the rural Andhra Pradesh, there is a thoughtful effort for nurturing sensitivity and also the idea of awakening intelligence mainly through culture classes discussion, a non-authoritarian relationship between teachers and students, the assembly and intense engagement in rural development and environmental activities (Thapan, 2015). As the director of the Valley school also quotes, "the methodology of school is deeply committed to look at the holistic intelligence of the student which moves beyond the cerebral and intellectual capacity and also the ability of the individual to value beauty, art and other aspects". Instead of simply manufacturing engineers, scientists, or professionals the aim of education should be to foster the development of "the totality of the mind" which allows students to live with a sense of wholeness and beauty (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 76). The primary aim of this study is not about how philosophical the intent is, but the way of implementation inside the school campus.

From intent to initiative : Bridging the Gap

Peterson and Deal (2002) define school culture as the “underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time” (p. 10), shaping how teachers, students, and administrators think and act. Every school has its own culture, the three elements that constitute the Valley school’s culture is the organizational practice, the discursive practice and the value embodied in Krishnamurti’s philosophy (Thapan, 2006). In the framework of KFI schools, the practices can be seen as a pedagogical intervention made deliberately in order to inculcate sensitivity, autonomy, and freedom from fear. Cultural practices in the alternative education system are often used to counter the alienation of both students and teachers that mainstream schooling produces. The pedagogical approach of the Valley school emphasizes that both students and teachers should not only engage with the outer world but also with their inner world. This cannot be seen only as a philosophical or spiritual quest but also as a practical effort to understand the mechanism of one's own mind and the reasons that influence it. The environment for this is cultivated through relationships that are not based on an authoritarian position but on a human-to-human connection.

Rituals can be defined as 'an expression and an affirmation of the school's ultimate values' (Thapan, 2006, p. 73) connecting with Krishnamurti’s stress on attentiveness in every daily life. At The Valley School, one such ritual includes singing assemblies in the morning where students and teachers sit together in a circle on the same level, without a podium or hierarchical separation cultivating the participatory behaviour and collectiveness of the school as whole (Choudhury, 2018) . Ceremonies such as planting trees on the school’s birthday every year become a symbolic act that binds the school community and collective responsibility. These rituals and ceremonies together play a significant function when they are embodied into the institution’s routine providing students with a sense of belonging (Thapan, 2006, p. 75). When understanding rituals in school, an emphasis should be also made on the subjective meaning acquired by the individuals (Thapan, 2006).

One of the other KFI schools located in Andhra Pradesh, Rishi Valley School, integrates awareness of the environment into its curriculum mainly through multiple activities like tree planting, soil conservation, which helps the students in cultivating a sense of responsibility towards nature (Thapan ,2015). Throughout my field work in Valley School, I observed how nature is an important part of the curriculum of the school. The idea of sensitivity towards

nature can be observed through the nature walks in junior school, planting, tinkering lab activities among middle school students, and also litter picking assembly once a month across the whole school. This practice also echoes Krishnamurti's proposal that education must not only spread knowledge but should be able to stimulate "the joy of seeing the beauty of the earth" (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 75). Herzberger (2018), in her work "Values and the Culture of School," portrays how the priority of KFI schools lies in certain elements like "kindliness, affection, and tenderness," thus nurturing sensitivity in the educational space. In the Valley School, the teacher-student relationship often portrays how these elements play an essential role in school life. Allowing students to engage in self-inquiry and also creating relationships based on trust can only be achieved if the school's pedagogy revolves around a space free from fear, competition & authoritarianism (Thapan, 2001). The absence of fear can be looked at as a requirement for cultivating sensitivity in oneself. When a student is charged by the fear from teachers or competition from peers it makes their minds dull and cannot help in creating a new world (Krishnamurti, 1963).

Creating Safe Spaces Through Sensitivity

To create a safe environment, there is a need for Indian schools to address issues such as harsh disciplinary methods and also the rigid authoritarian teacher-student relationship, as acknowledged by The Teacher Foundation (n.d.). Highlights of their research include how discipline foregrounded on fear, judgmental language, and insensitivity often leads to students' open expression of feelings. As Krishnamurti in his work argued that acceptance of authority "breeds fear" and deadens initiative (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 72), he directly addresses these concerns, advocating for dialogic relationships where teachers and students learn together. In Valley School, the idea of safe space where students engage in conversation with each other and with teachers by feeling of not being judged or mocked. This is often visible through the kind of conversations that were taking place on the campus, whether in classrooms, dining halls, student forums, ranging from conversations of their daily routine, something new they discovered and things that did not interest them. The idea of fear among students often restricts them from seeing schools as a safe space.

The philosophical approach of sensitivity finds partial resonance in contemporary educational frameworks. A number of research studies have been taking place in the contemporary educational discourse on socio-emotional learning (SEL) that provides further insight into

why nurturing sensitivity is pedagogically significant. Socio emotional learning framework focuses on key elements like empathy , self awareness and responsible relationships as significant educational goals (CASEL, 2020). SEL tries to frame these abilities as skills to be learned but in Valley school sensitivity is something profound and which comes from the conditioning of the student. Here the Valley school tries to provide an environment where sensitivity is embodied by the individual over time. Connecting this with Krishnamurti's idea of sensitivity, which involves self-knowing, empathy, and right relationship with others and nature, helps to understand the alternative schooling in regard to Valley School. However, Krishnamurti's educational approach goes beyond skill-based learning. He argues that sensitivity requires 'constant denial of little things' that dull perception (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 77) leading to 'flowering in goodness'. Sensitivity is not a skill which one can gain through training but it also requires subtracting of minor clutters that dull an individual's mind. The absence of competitive assessment of students makes the individuals to flower into better human beings. SEL by emphasizing freedom from psychological conditioning and mechanical patterns of thought . This offers a deeper, more experiential dimension to SEL by locating sensitivity as a pathway to radical change rather than merely enhanced behavior or emotional regulation.

Methodology

This study employs an ethnographic method to examine how cultural practices at The Valley School, Bengaluru, construct and communicate sensitivity as a pedagogical value. Ethnography was chosen as the primary methodology because it allows for sustained, situated observation of how meaning is produced through everyday practice. Rather than measuring outcomes, the study focuses on process of how sensitivity is structured, enacted, and negotiated within the school's daily life. Fieldwork was conducted over one month, from 15th June to 15th July 2025, with the researcher residing on campus throughout. The study drew on multiple methods of data collection - participant observation across a range of school spaces and activities, semi-structured with teachers, students, parents, alumni, and staff, and informal conversations that arose naturally in the course of daily school life. Observed activities included morning assemblies, dining hall practices, nature walks, culture classes, library sessions, Art Village sessions, Vertical Group Meetings, and hostel routines.

Particular attention was given to the middle school and senior school where cultural classes and

classroom interactions were observed .Time was also spent at the school's Study Centre to understand its relationship to Krishnamurti's philosophy and its role in shaping the school's pedagogical orientation. Access to different spaces inside the campus was negotiated carefully throughout. Permission was sought from teachers prior to attending classes, and from house parents before visiting the girls' hostel. The research was conducted with the understanding that no classes would be disrupted. Interviews and conversations were conducted across a range of locations including classrooms, the dining hall, the Art Village, the hostel to capture the variety of relational contexts in which sensitivity is cultivated.

As a researcher positioned as an outsider who is unfamiliar with Kannada and stays in the school guesthouse rather than fully embedded in campus life , my access and observations were inevitably shaped by this positionality. Interactions occurred predominantly in English, and the presence of a researcher may have influenced how participants chose to articulate their experiences. These constraints are acknowledged in interpreting the findings. Given the one-month duration of fieldwork, this study makes no claims about the long-term outcomes of these practices for students. The focus is on what the school does and how it does it ; how sensitivity is structured as intent and enacted through practice rather than on what it ultimately produces in individuals over time. The findings are organised around three thematic axes that emerged from the fieldwork: sensitivity towards nature and beauty, sensitivity towards self, and sensitivity towards others.

Mapping of the school

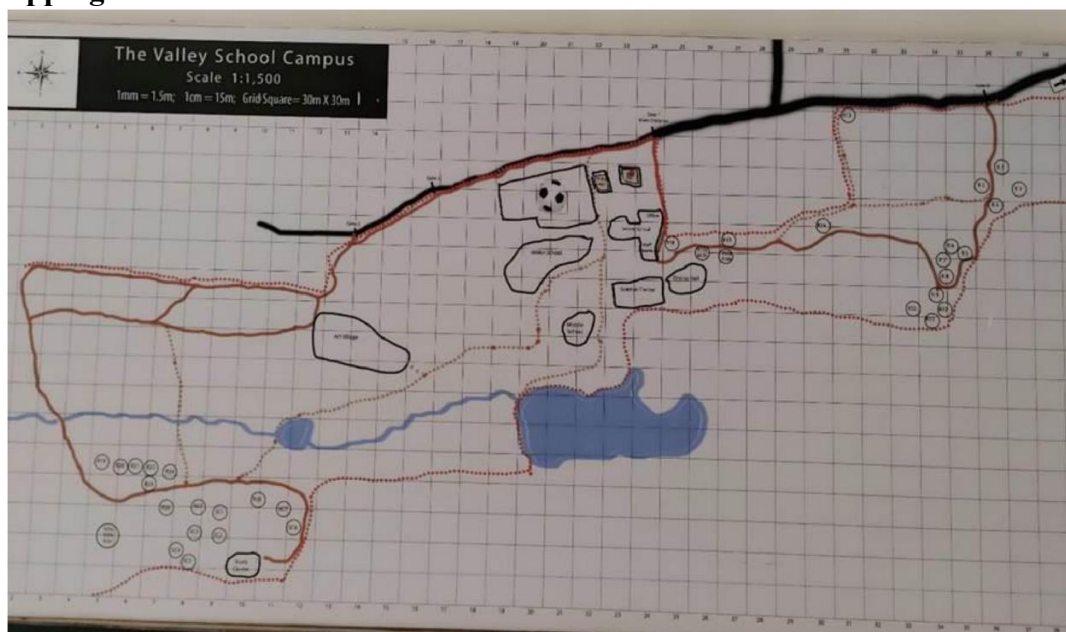


Image clicked on 18th June 2025, The Valley School Campus, Bengaluru.

EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND SHARED RITUALS

On my first day at Valley, I followed class 11th and 12th grade students who were heading to the dining hall. At the entrance of the dining hall, everybody removes their footwear, washes their hands, and enters the hall. I followed their act and did the same. The smell of sambar and vada drifted me towards the dining hall along with the sound of morning hustle among the students during breakfast. Inside the hall, the seating arrangement immediately struck me, lowlying tables and bamboo mats placed for seating, and no elevated seating was there for teachers separately, making it an equal space for everybody. The whole school, which included teachers and students seated together on an equal level. The kind of bodily arrangement tells what *Peterson and Deal* argue that architecture and the physical setting play key roles in the culture of the school. This is significant because the non-hierarchical ideal is not communicated through rules or announcements but inscribed in physical space itself, making it something students encounter with their bodies before they articulate it as a value precisely the kind of embodied learning Krishnamurti associates with genuine sensitivity. It can reinforce a sense of community among the students and teachers, and communicate the core intent and values of the school (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 77). The idea of ground-level arrangement shows the school tried to embody a non-hierarchical relation in the school.

The spoons were not present in the dining hall, because eating with hands was part of the school's culture and everyone is expected to eat in the same manner. During my conversation with many of the students, they preferred to eat with spoons, but they also understood that eating with hands is part of the Valley's culture. This is a practice that tries to cultivate direct and also some kind of sensory dealing with the food, and urging that attention is very significant and also must be there in ordinary acts such as eating, walking, or speaking. (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 9) Eating can then be looked at as not just a mechanical task, and by engaging with the senses fully, feeling the texture and warmth of the food, as quoted by the School's director, students tend to experience eating as a moment of observation and internalisation. This presents a small but analytically interesting tension: the practice of eating with hands is itself imposed as a condition for sensory awareness. The cultivation of non-coerced sensitivity here requires a form of structured compulsion - a paradox that runs through many of the school's deliberate practices."

The valley offers day schooling for classes 1 to 10 and residential setup for grade 11 and 12, whereas the meals are provided completely by the school across sections, where hostellers and teachers who are residents of the campus start with an early breakfast. Around 9:30am, soon after the first period, there is a short break named “Ragi break” for the whole school where simple snacks, including sweet potato, lemonade, soup, etc, are served. Lunch breaks are allotted at two different times: from 11:30am to 12:15pm for Junior School and Middle School students and teachers, and from 12:15 to 1pm for senior school. The seating arrangement during this particular break needs to be noted, where students are mixed across classes and put into different groups, and one or two teachers are allocated to the particular table. As Thapan noted in her study on Rishi Valley School, there is a lack of interaction between junior and senior students vertical age grouping in the setting of house (Thapan, 2006, p. 199) and vertical age grouping can be seen as a ritual which is intentional to avoid explicit hierarchy or classification and help students navigate sensitivity, also making senior students take up the role of nurturers or mentors by the social interactions that take place in school.

The ritual of vertical age group seating during the lunch break is a deliberate way of disrupting age-based differentiation. Mullis and Fincher (1996) argue that rituals define the school community by creating shared experiences that cut across individual differences and this practice does precisely that by forcing daily interaction across age groups that would otherwise remain separate. Crucially, this arrangement does not simply produce familiarity alone but it produces a specific *kind* of sensitivity towards others. Older students are placed in a position where they must attend to younger ones noticing when a junior student needs help, moderating their own behaviour, taking on an informal care role. Younger students, in turn, experience being genuinely seen and included by those older than them. The lunch table becomes, in this way, a small but daily rehearsal of the relational attentiveness that Krishnamurti identifies as central to sensitivity towards others.

As soon as lunch was complete, students would rush to clean their tables according to the given timetables, which included different routines. Every student and teacher washed their own plates and glasses before leaving the dining hall premises. I also noticed how later *akkas* (kitchen staff) washed them once again, showing that this kind of daily act does not focus on how clean the plate or glass is, but mainly on inculcating this habit from a very early stage. The dining hall then acts as a site of “lived curriculum” where students and teachers together learn to be responsible and embody this kind of act into everyday life (Maxwell & Roofe, 2020, p. 28).

During one of the lunch breaks, I was sitting with the junior school children, and there was a lot of clatter, but at the same time, everybody patiently waited for their lunch and prayer to be completed. Teachers were seen helping junior school children serve themselves. At one corner of the table, I noticed how one child did not like the food served, but the teacher assigned to that table tried to have a conversation with him regarding the importance of eating vegetables. Later, the teacher told me , many children feel reluctant to consume certain foods, especially vegetables. We try to talk with them and do not force the child at their own pace. An assembly is conducted at the commencement of the session to inform students about dietary practices in the school. This kind of dialogic approach (Krishnamurti’s ,1974) brings out the idea that education must not be anything compelled but mainly through conversation. In the same way, sensitivity towards food cannot also be understood through strict imposition of rules, but more by helping children to reflect. The dietary pattern of the school is not just about the idea of providing food to consume, moreover Valley serves light also locally sourced food for the physical well being. Students initially struggle with the absence of processed foods and spoons or forks, but later adapt with the food culture leading to the act of sensory consciousness by eating with hands. Dining hall here brings together students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds to eat the same food with the same seating arrangement, which shows that the dining hall doesn’t just act as a place to eat but plays the role of a space where a sense of belonging, sensitivity, and non-hierarchical relations are built through everyday practices.

Assembly at Mahasagar

Assemblies in the Valley were unique and different from the conventional assemblies in other mainstream schools. All the students and teachers come together and sit in a circle in the Mahasagar Hall. The school has a book named “*Naadninad*” which has a collection of songs from different languages and cultures, varying from English, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Gujarati, etc, to certain tribal songs in India and outside India. This rich collection becomes a vehicle for what Krishnamurti might call “awakening sensitivity to the world,” allowing children to experience cultural diversity through music . Everybody sits together and sings “*there is no podium or raised stage-like structure from which to give out directions or make announcements*” **Choudhury, P. (2018)**. The spatial arrangement tries to communicate what Krishnamurti argues as learning can only happen when both students and teachers are free from the idea of explicit authority and fear (Krishnamurti, 1974).

During my stay in the valley , the music teacher tried to introduce and teach new songs as preparation for the school birthday to the whole school in the morning assembly. Students are not compelled to participate enthusiastically, but the assembly functions as an open invitation where a recurring structure that makes cultural exposure available without coercion. The various assemblies include *singing assemblies* , *nature walk assemblies*, *litter-picking assemblies*, *assemblies where presentations and discussions are done by Senior school Students*, etc. Parul Bhandari in her work *In Quest of Identity: Student Culture in a Religious Minority Institution*, argues that the morning assembly is one of the primary ritual at the school, exemplifying how cultural practices can foster sensitivity in students, transforming virtues into lived experiences, directing us to the idea that sensitivity is socially and institutionally cultivated (Bhandari, 2014, p. 201). For the idea of “aesthetic sensitivity” as the director quotes during the conversation is of Krishnamurti’s intent to nurture this kind of sensitivity towards music can be seen through the morning assembly where the students and teachers actively collect the song books and sit together - a ritual to start off the day and recite the songs of various kinds in the book about the beauty of nature, folk songs, regional songs etc as part of awakening the intelligence internally. The everyday acts through these kinds of assemblies help in cultivating the awareness and empathy towards self, towards others, and also to the natural surroundings, and the Valley school as a space provides an environment where students deal with their own pace.

Classroom arrangement

Classroom arrangement focuses on minimizing hierarchy and fostering equality, openness, and interaction between students and with teachers as well. Consequently, junior school classrooms are designed quite differently from middle and senior school classrooms. Junior's classrooms have circular and scattered arrangements with only low-lying tables and bamboo mats placed on the floor, whereas in the middle school, there are airy classrooms with tables and chairs placed not in a linear way because the learning pedagogies vary across grades. This informal arrangement reinforces a sense of community and manifests the values of the school's mission (Peterson and Deal ,2002, p. 69).

The idea of bells is absent in the school it is not merely a logistical choice but a pedagogical one were it allocates the regulation of time from an external authority to the internalisation of each student, requiring them to develop attentiveness to the rhythms of shared life. Across junior school, we see students are not allocated based on their classes, but grade 1 classes are given names like Bulbul and Koel (names of birds), enabled by two teachers, and classes 2,3,4 follow mixed-age learning. The 6 groups are named after the synonyms of earth, like Ila, Pritvi, Bhuvi, and Medhini. Mahi,Oorja. In the middle school, the students categorise themselves as class 5,6, 7, but their classrooms are given names of constellations too which shows that there is an early, constant embedding of a nature-connected identity into the school's spatial vocabulary. The walls of the classroom were mainly decorated with children's art and India's map in junior school.

ROLE OF DIALOGUE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN FOSTERING SENSITIVITY

There is a difference between a dialogue and a dialectical argument , a dialogue is not necessarily about reasoning , logic or an argument but it is just conversation between one individual and the speaker where a sense of non judgemental conversation takes place (Krishnamurti ,1973, p.759). Valley school becomes a space where the exchange of dialogue takes place in different ways between students, teachers, and parents. This act takes place in different ways through dialogue sessions for teachers to ensure that they are ready to embody the school's philosophy, and the school also engages with the parents , mostly who make a conscious choice of enrolling their child in the school, but also situations arose where they

expressed fears when the expectations of society are not met. As the director quoted, the school's Study centre also plays a central role for students, teachers, and parents to reflect upon themselves, as one of the key aspects of Krishnamurti's philosophy is the recognition that teachers and parents, like students, must also engage in this process of self-inquiry.

During my conversation, the director also mentioned how the idea of dialogue is very precious in nurturing sensitivity, and also the idea of listening and modesty among all individuals. Throughout my fieldwork, I saw how teachers and students, among students, among teachers, there is a dialogue taking place in different locations of the campus, whether it's through classroom interactions or outside classroom interactions.

During my fieldwork, one of the most striking insights came from a conversation with one of the middle school teachers about the kinds of concerns students raise with them. A very common issue posed by the teacher, especially among girls, is the feeling of exclusion, like not being invited to birthday parties, not being included in a specific group, or being left out of the game played. Concerns like misplaced belongings, the use of hurtful language by their peers, and, for boys in particular, experiences of exclusion on the sports field, such as not having the ball or frisbee passed to them. Interestingly, a few students also expressed fear or discomfort when a teacher was too strict or intimidating. Such concerns show how peer interactions tend to re-create the common social phenomena of exclusion even within a school that has established itself as one where hierarchies of power do not exist. Indeed, the approach being used by the school, in having students understand their own participation in this process, echoes the philosophy of Krishnamurti about the importance of self-exploration to morality. Teachers follow a two-fold approach to address such concerns. The first way is to help students see the situation from numerous perspectives, and slightly guide them to recognize how their own actions may also play a part, and there is an engagement with the concerned adult to ensure that the power dynamics do not become authoritative. This dialogic approach reflects the school's commitment to creating a safe space where students feel heard, also encouraging them to develop self-awareness.

Student-teacher relations

The school's main aim lies in the student-teacher relationship, which is not an explicitly hierarchical one but rather based on a human-to-human relation. During my conversation with many teachers, they conveyed that their task is not to mold the students but to create a proper environment for learning and self-inquiry. *As Krishnamurti quotes, there is a need to change*

the traditional approach where the teacher teaches and students learn which is essentially hierarchical in nature and how they need to function at the same level where communication happens through questioning and counter questioning till the depths of the problem are exposed and understanding is revealed, illuminating the mind of both (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 5). Starting from addressing teachers with uncle, aunty, bhaiyya ,akka, and also calling them names shows that the conventional idea of addressing teachers with ma'am or sir is not present. The student-teacher relationship also varies across age groups; for example, the kind of concerns and discussions among students and teachers also changes over the age groups. Looking at the pedagogy of the Valley school we see how there is a constant effort that school tries to minimize the idea of competition and fear , for example teachers do not give any kind numerical gradings for students till grade 8 and the report card mainly talks about the growth of the student over the year in a story format which allows a student to feel that they are not judged or ranked but rather understood clearly by the teacher. This kind of practice in the valley also aligns with the idea that Krishnamurti makes that fear and competition dull the brain and prevent genuine learning (Krishnamurti, 1974). Most of the classroom interactions I observed were in middle school, which included grades across 5.6.7, and how these reflect the teaching approach. In one of the Grade 6 math classes, the teacher patiently waited for the students to complete the sum, ensuring that no one was left behind. When one of them struggled, the teacher slowed down the lesson rather than moving ahead with the majority. This kind of practice conveys that all students have their own pace and each one's understanding is valued, reducing the fear among students.

One of the defining features of Valley School, as noted by a long-term teacher, is the stress on relationships between students and teachers, and between students and learning materials. These kinds of relationships nurture fearlessness, engagement, and meaningful classroom interactions, forming the foundation for the school's pedagogical practices. Krishnamurti's idea of 'true education' and "essence of freedom" is rightly reflected in the actions of teachers towards students within and beyond the classroom. Teachers adopted the policy of co-learning, intervention when withdrawal is harmful, giving students autonomy to learn at their own pace, rather than pushing them to "solve problems". Teachers often interact with students in an informal environment through practices like long walks with students, which give them open space for interaction. These practices give us understanding that teacher-student relationships are rooted in dialogue, courage, openness, and help, which illustrate the school's commitment towards dismantling fear as the driver of learning. The effect of such forces on the students is to make them examine their own conditioning and

acquire the ability to be accountable for their own actions. The point is not merely that teachers are friendly and easy to approach, something that most educational institutions endeavour to achieve. The framework itself has been deliberately designed as a pedagogical tool. The lack of fear, the use of informal language, and the role of co-learning adopted by teachers are not mere cultural phenomena at the school but conditions essential for developing sensitivity toward others.

Vertical group meetings

One of the core aspects of the school's culture is to reduce competition and also create a sense of inclusion through collectivity. Vertical group meetings, also called VGMs, are one such practice that takes place once a week. Here, senior students spend time with junior and middle school students, which acts as an important cultural practice. This initiative tries to break down the age-based hierarchy and foster inter-age mentorship and care. Some students may initially participate for the sake of it, but the practice creates opportunities for making connections in school and shared activities, like a few girls weaving crochet and a few boys playing cricket. Despite the school's intention of non-hierarchical relationships among peers, subtle exclusion can still exist, as observed during fieldwork that some older students speak less in mixed-age settings. The school's efforts to address this through practices like Vertical Group Meetings are an active response to this challenge. The VGMs illustrate what Mullis and Fincher (1996, p. 28) *define* as activity that “defines the school community” and fosters the creation of opportunities for mentorship across ages. There is a fascinating gap between intention and practice here. By organizing the classroom into mixed ages, the school is trying to break down the hierarchical model of teacher and student, instead set up a more horizontal space where every student can learn from those around them. Here the older students often feel pressured by the expectation to mentor which may sometimes disconnect rather than engaging. The school's awareness of this and its continued focus on VGMs despite this imperfection, suggests an institutional honesty about the limits of structured practice.

Culture classes

Culture classes are essential to this educational model of KFI schools, functioning from the junior to senior school levels. These classes are flexible and do not have a strict curriculum, and act as spaces to address both issues faced by students inside the school and also larger

global problems. They serve as a stage for students to "learn to look, learn to listen,"(Krishnamurti ,1974, p. 6) and to critically observe their own reactions, and to reexamine their assumptions. Often topics like bullying, insensitivity, body shaming, and freedom are addressed mostly immediate matters within the school. In the junior school, it's mainly termed as circle time or CT with class teachers where every kind of activity and engagements are done, all the concerns are taken into care.

In middle school, there are two ways in which culture classes are done . One is run by the counsellor, and the focus is on social-emotional well-being of students. As the middle school coordinator quoted, 'This is the age where they start having more self-doubts, exclusion, et cetera, become more common'. The counselor takes some of the threads and helps them process those ideas so that they can deal with them a little better, and deal with the

challenges of adolescence a little better. Class teachers take classes twice a month. Themes like freedom , sensitivity, friendship, etc, are chosen; the idea is just to get the thinking process going and not arrive at a conclusion. Transition stage of students, especially from junior to middle school , particularly when entering class 5, as noted by most of the teachers. The peer relations are created slowly, where there is a shift in their social position by becoming the youngest in middle school. A period of early adolescence, self-consciousness, and intense emotion comes into play, which teachers find slightly challenging to navigate.

The senior school culture class takes place once a month. On one occasion, the chosen topic for discussion was *Sensitivity*. One of the 12th-grade students highlighted the agenda for choosing this topic. She explained that it was regarded by the class teacher of her brother's class, who was in 9th grade. Throughout the session, it was the students who led the discussion, while the teachers simply facilitated it. In these sessions, students from Grades 8 to 12 are mixed into different groups, and the discussions take place in the presence of two or three teachers . Some students actively engaged in the conversation, while others remained silent. However, there was no pressure on the quieter students to speak, but they would be participating as listeners. As it was a mixed group activity, the sessions focused on building a meaningful dialogue with a mutual inquiry. The aim is to cultivate a "way of living" (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 11) in the school where students are free to express their thoughts and feelings in a constructive manner, where there is no judgment, and critically reflect on themselves and society. These kinds of sessions not only enable the idea of reflecting on topics like sensitivity but also provide a safe and democratic space where the variety of

opinions lead the discussion. The topics for discussion included

“What is the need for sensitivity? How might our insensitivity impact another person, or the environment around us?”

What makes us insensitive? Do we always know when we are? If we don't realize we are being insensitive, does that excuse our behaviour?”

How deep is our sensitivity? Is it part of our being or is it influenced by external factors such as others' behaviour/approval/disapproval?”

The questions chosen for discussion reveal the school's pedagogical intent clearly, rather than defining sensitivity for students, the aim is to make it an object of collective inquiry, allowing meaning to emerge through dialogue rather than instruction.

Living in the Hostel

The hostel at Valley School provides accommodation for students of Grades 11 and 12, with the majority being week boarders and a smaller number of full boarders. Boys and girls are housed separately, with the girls' hostel comprising approximately 32 residents across rooms of four, each overseen by female house parents which is same for the boys hostel too where there are male houseparents for the surveillance. Though the hostel is a fairly conventional space of a bounded residential area with a schedule, rules and adult supervision, it is nonetheless subject to the same pedagogical intentions that shape the rest of campus life. The spaces of the classroom and dining hall are where the school cultivates sensitivity to certain practices on a daily basis. The hostel extends this process of cultivating sensitivity into the more intimate spaces and rhythms of regular, daily living.

A prominent feature of the hostels is that students are every semester re-housed, i.e. given new room-mates and put in a new part of the hostel. With the exception of Grade 12 students in the final term of Secondary School who may choose to stay together in the last year before going out, students do not choose to live with particular friends and are confined to the hostel for part of the term with students from other years whom they have never met before. This policy is one manifestation of the school's sensitivity to others, enforcing for the students the open structural condition that is openness as a virtue only in later life.

Just as the morning assembly followed a circular pattern without a central authority, the weekly meetings of each “house” were held in a similar manner in the form of discussion circle called Sangam. The discussion circle consisted of students and house parents together. All grievances and announcements were shared in that space. Differences in the hostel were not allowed to fester and rise into conflicts; instead they were tackled through conversation and dialogue. The school believed in treating every conflict as an opportunity for self-reflection rather than as a problem to be managed.

There is also an ingrained aspect to the busy daily routine of the school, in the form of fifteen minutes of silent time in the hostel every night. This period of stillness and reflection is about cultivating the kind of awareness Krishnamurti talked about to be sensitive to oneself. Late night studying is not encouraged, and students are left to manage their own study schedule, rather than being dictated to. Students can move freely between rooms till 9 pm and then expect things to settle down the school is not into externality, and they expect children to understand this. The hostel also moves on from social activity to a more quiet mode gradually, and it is left to the children.

This school’s focus is on relational practices over institutional ones and it is just this sensitivity to a student who has just landed in an unfamiliar place that requires another person to be sensitive to them. What the building and physical spaces of the hostel might inspire you to ponder is how the school’s pedagogical project extends into the daily life of a student. The hostel itself is organised in a deliberate manner. The way rooms are assigned, the schedule for meetings, the idea of silence periods and the methods of dealing with conflicts all point towards an effort to make sensitivity a ‘habit’ rather than a one off lesson or discussion.

DEEPER LOOK INTO AESTHETIC SENSITIVITY

Aesthetic Sensitivity refers to an extent to which an individual appreciates, recognises and acknowledges the beauty of nature , art and life (Smolewska et al., 2006)). In the valley this can be observed through nature walks, activities in Art Village, Library sessions etc. The physical environment of the valley facilitates active participation in learning, as nature walks are a vital part of the curriculum of the school. An activity which I thoroughly enjoyed was going for different walks with various classes ranging from junior school to middle school, and then senior school. The huge, lush green campus was the space where the walks took place, which happened at any time of the day. Teachers take the class around the campus, asking them to be calm and

silent so that they can see the beauty of plants, flowers, and hear the sounds of different birds and multiple insects along with other species. Among the junior school, this happens mainly to enlighten them with the idea of appreciating the beauty of nature and how they can become individuals who are sensitive to nature, along with the assistance of either class teachers or other teachers. Moving to middle school, I found that, especially among the 5th graders, students went for walks as a part of their learning experience, where, rather than studying the plants and their parts only from a centralized book, they were taken to explore this inside the campus and also foster a kind of curiosity within them.

Teachers also ask them to think and reflect upon these kinds of lessons, including smelling the flowers, touching the leaves, and also one important activity, which I saw is that children were asked to get their drawing books and observe the trees and draw them during these kinds of walks. During the nights, post dinner, I also accompanied grade 11 and 12 students to the walks at night, and also for firefly watching, watching fireflies silently at night was a visual treat along acting as a space of silence and calmness, and to appreciate the beauty. As Krishnamurti's philosophy suggests an individual cannot clearly think if they are not sensitive, especially towards the nature and the idea of intelligence is that how well you can see the beauty of the earth, the beauty of the trees, the beauty of the skies, the lovely sunset, the stars, the beauty of subtlety (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 21). As part of the curriculum, students spend an extensive amount of time outdoors, deeply observing nature. During my informal conversation with teachers, they highlighted that 60-70% of the junior school science curriculum is centered around campus plants, birds, water bodies, and seasonal cycles. Moreover, history and civics are also taught through the valley's history in middle school. This nature-inclusive curriculum develops a sensitive relationship between students and nature, and it makes them passionate about wildlife and the conservation of nature. This curricular choice enacts Krishnamurti's argument that intelligence can be understood as sensitivity and cannot be developed through abstraction alone but it requires sustained, attentive interaction with the living world (Krishnamurti, 1974).

Art Village

The Art Village at The Valley School developed as a key site for understanding how sensitivity is nurtured through engagement with art, nature, and experience. The initiative behind this art village is to give children an exposure to all the art forms, whether it's visual or performing, and right from a very young age, like from the entry level from class I to Class

XII. Now, Class I to Class VII spend half a day, twice, like one full day, considering in terms of time, one full day per week in the Art Village, half a day for visual arts, and half a day for performing arts. From class 9, there is an option of choosing whatever art form students like and spending at least a considerable amount of time to finish one project at least in that area. Class 8 also follows the middle school pattern. In middle school, different art forms are offered by different teachers. Whereas in junior school, for the visual arts, there's only one teacher who takes the students through whatever medium or art forms they want to give exposure like poetry, craft, and art. Class 8 also follows the same pattern. The students engage in two art forms in a term in both areas. At the senior school level, it's about the elective, whoever chooses, comes for six classes, two blocks, two periods.

The different art forms in Valley for the visual arts, include art, craft, carpentry, pottery, and claywork. In the performing arts, tabla, mridangam, dance, theater, and music. The Valley school doesn't try to look at art as a specific outcome; it's mainly seen as a form of expression and how students engage with the art, also reflecting the educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore mainly dealt with the idea of art in education as a creative way of expressing oneself, when a student dance, sing or perform any kind of art form, rather than looking at the instrumental outputs, it's moreover a way they identify their relationship with the entire world by intensifying the empathetic capacity, cognitive growth (Lesar, 2015, p.119) The aim is to give students exposure to various kinds of art forms and follow a flexible curriculum, but some forms of art do require a certain discipline. *“If you are a Bharatnatyam dancer, we are not expecting you to teach Bharatnatyam from whatever stage till some.*

Dance is a movement or rhythm. However, you can bring it in a way that appeals to children”, said the Art Village coordinator, showing the way art is exposed to students. Teachers have the freedom to provide sessions according to the developmental and emotional needs of students, one of the practices that resonates with Krishnamurti’s idea for education to remain fluid and responsive, not only mechanical (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 15). There are workshops conducted where artisans not only share their craft but also their ways of living to know about different cultures and reflect upon them. One of the teachers noted that there is no compulsory learning, but moreover to just existing. The ability to see life as an integrated process and not in fragments, which *Krishnamurti described as a “wholeness of perception”* (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 71). Throughout the learning process in the Valley, the children’s way of engaging with art varies, and it’s not a linear progression, as each stage of development also has its own challenges. The Art Village is not only a space for students but also for teachers to reflect on their own learning process as they constantly negotiate between their role as educators and their artist identity. Questions like: where should I relax? Have I been too rigid? There are certain questions that come up in their minds which also reflect Krishnamurti's idea of teachers acting as co-learners and going through similar processes of enquiry along with students (Krishnamurti, 1981/2001, p. 112). The Art Village thus becomes a site of dual inquiry at one end students explore their relationship to expression, while teachers are also simultaneously asked to examine their own conditioning about what art they should produce. Both are, in Krishnamurti's terms, learning rather than performing.

Library culture

The library in Valley school is more than just a physical space where books are silently read or issued for reading; this also acts as a pedagogy for the intent of the school. The library programme is divided into three components : reading for pleasure, reading for research, and reading to think. These are not segregated into a separate compartment; rather, use these three aspects of reading to encourage them to engage with different kinds of literature, and the way they get into these books also varies. Reading for pleasure is primarily for everyone, from the youngest to the oldest in the school , the idea of reading that entertains one individual. Reading for research is something that typically begins in middle school, where students are directed to read something, particularly on a topic related to something that's opened out in the classroom . In the Valley School, these are deliberate practices trying to minimise the use of digital devices, aligning with Krishnamurti's idea that learning should free the mind of the individual from conditioning. Digital devices supplement an individual's conditioning by providing constant entertainment and acquiring knowledge , dulling the mind's sensitivity and alertness of the individual. The deliberate activity of minimising the use of digital devices acts as a practice to reduce the mind from becoming mechanical and to allow the student to "learn from yourself "(Krishnamurti, 1974, p.44) .Library at The Valley School can be seen as an active extension of the classroom activity moulded by the Teachers as a pedagogical practice .

Reading to think, practice to explore the self and the world, for example, the “Mirrors and Windows” approach, the librarian conveyed that the same book that can be entertaining can also make you think about yourself and the world a little differently. So it's about creating those opportunities to push their thinking, to create opportunities to delve into something deeply, unpacking a book. There are some aspects of this that happen in the classroom, for instance, in middle school or junior school, they read one text for a long period of time. Learning to read differently is one aspect in the library where a theme is chosen, and students choose their own books and try to reflect on people who are either like them or different.

The library also acts as a space where reading sessions, library sessions create an awareness among children about sensitivity, autonomy, and also inclusiveness. The library is a common space which will remain the same throughout the year, only the relationship with the space changes, and how the students use the space changes. But these are spaces that they grow into in a way. It's always a conversation that when they are in the library, there is usually someone

else inhabiting the space. The traditional idea of a library as a quiet space is not there, but rather a space for conversations, laughter, and games. It's kept open for the reasons that, always, silence does not help learning because learning always doesn't happen quietly. A vibrant space can also be engaging and help you learn more purposefully. The quiet space can only work for children who require a quiet environment, but for those who are less interested in reading, there is a need to find ways to engage them. A few games where the idea of it always is that we are a community, community games, a lot of group games, and a lot of group experiences are involved. A book relay is one such activity where a single book is chosen for a class or section, and it's based completely on trust because a person takes the book and then it's their responsibility to pass it on to the next person in line, and also keep to the timeline. A book relay works because it's exciting for people to come together, and for children also to be part of a group experience.

A democratised process of buying books happens in the valley, and that is in the aspect of curation of book lists. So at the end of the academic year, a list is circulated to the teachers by looking for suggestions, not necessarily the ones that they are using in the classroom. A list from teachers and students is curated. One specific attempt at getting a list from the hostile children, because that's also an age group that doesn't use the library as much. They're pretty much engaged academically and in other things in campus life. The library doesn't really become a space for them. The lists are compiled and reviewed by a library committee consisting of teachers from across the school. The library also regularly weeds out outdated or irrelevant books, exchanging fiction titles for newer ones to keep the collection fresh. The diversity of the books in the library is a key point to be noted, as it has been almost 47 years since this school was established, and with the numbers as well as the depth, the collection of books has increased. As a librarian, what she focuses on is mostly different voices and complex conversations, and this is done through a process.

“A few years ago, we did an entire series on banned books, children's books that were banned across time. Why were they banned, and the socio-political realities of the time? And it led to a lot of interesting conversations on how children look at books. So it's not just the age appropriateness, which is a very misleading term,” quoted the librarian Meera. This approach treats the library not as a source of approved knowledge but as a space of creative discomfort, where books are chosen precisely because they dismantle assumptions and require students to examine their own frameworks of understanding.

Recently, the aim is to expand fictional collections and include global perspectives among middle school students, as part of their “Reading the World” activity, where students track down geographically diverse fictions by marking countries on a map throughout the year. A wider preference for English language books is seen compared to regional language books in Kannada, Sanskrit, and Hindi due to the availability and also the way the books are presented in a non-attractive manner. This kind of democratic process of collaborative setting up of a diverse and relevant collection also fosters a sense of shared ownership among teachers and students, further reflecting the school’s commitment to keep the library an evolving cultural and pedagogical space.

School Birthday

Although I missed the opportunity to attend the school's birthday, the rehearsal gave me an idea of how it would look. It can be observed as a cultural practice, embodying a commitment to sensitivity and community feeling. The school’s philosophy emphasised that learning must foster a sense of wholeness in which students and teachers feel connected to one another, to nature, and also to the larger world (Krishnamurti, 1974). The entire school assembled in a unique formation, with students from different grades 12, 10, 1st to 9th, and 11th standing together in a single line. This deliberate arrangement, along with the presence of teachers throughout the march, visually disrupted traditional hierarchies. The procession moved to a designated area where the core of the event was the act of tree planting, principally carried out by the senior students of Grades 12 and 10, as they are the outgoing batch, they are given the opportunity. This practice instilled a sense of sensitivity to the earth and collective responsibility for the school’s legacy and natural environment. **It's** a ritual that makes collective responsibility for the natural environment physically tangible, not just in philosophical statement. Subsequently, songs were sung, and the school director, Jayaram uncle, addressed the school. Performances by students and teachers then started in the amphitheatre. This participation, from students marching together and planting to performing, shows school as a community where no individual feels left out and feels included and valued. One of the guiding principles of the KFI schools is that crafting of every kind of programmes happening in the school is inclusive in nature guaranteeing that every student has a part to play and fosters the idea of Krishnamurti that learning needs to be cooperative rather than competitive (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 37).

INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

During the course of one month of fieldwork at The Valley School, what becomes increasingly evident is that sensitivity is not something that is explicitly taught within a classroom setting or confined to a particular subject. Rather, it is something which gets woven into the everyday life of the school through a series of deliberate practices and arrangements starting from the absence of bells to the height of the tables in the dining hall, from the circle seating in the morning assembly to the fifteen minutes of silence in the hostel each evening. All these small practices, if we look at it as isolated, it could look like a simple, ordinary events happening in the school. But when placed together, they disclose a comprehensible and deliberate effort to create the kind of environment where sensitivity has gradually become a way of living, rather than a lesson to be taught.

The paper here is placed around three different components through which sensitivity is cultivated at Valley School which is sensitivity towards nature and beauty, towards self, and towards others, these are not separate from each other in practice as termed in paper. The nature walks, for instance students are not just learning about plants or birds in a conventional setting. Students are also asked to slowly observe, to be quiet, and to notice and collect things they might otherwise walk past. This kind of attentiveness to the outer world, it seems, is also about internalising attentiveness to the inner world. The vertical group meetings and the mixed age seating during lunch is not about creating mixed age friendships alone, its mostly about becoming attentive about others and also taking up responsibilities including to look out for who is included and who is left out.

The fieldwork also revealed that the two orders which is the school's philosophical ideal and the everyday reality when executed do not coincide in a perfect manner which the school is clearly aware about. During multiple conversations with teachers and students concerns came up about girls feeling excluded from birthday gatherings, some boys being left out on the sports ground, and at certain time a student feeling uncomfortable with a teacher who came across as too strict. But this is something which is not unique to this particular school but happens in every schools, primarily to note what is different here is how the school's pedagogy responds to them it is certainly not through punishment or a rigid set of rules but often through dialogue, and helping students reflect on their own position in a situation, by making spaces like culture classes where

diverse set of concerns can be openly discussed. Rather than an external authority making a decision here this kind of response reflects the Krishnamurti's belief that self-inquiry is very significant to be sensitive.

The most emerged tensions during the study is the question of social media and digital exposure. The Valley School is not a residential school for all students and only for 11th and 12th, which means that students who spend their day in an environment deliberately designed to cultivate attention and direct experience go home in the evenings or on weekends to a very different kind of setting. Outside the school they experience a lot of exposure to social media which is opposite to that school is trying to cultivate which is a more nurturing, thoughtful and free of fear and competition environment at school. Eventhough there is no perfect solution to this, starting from smaller grade the school's approach to homework and projects is designed to help the complete assignments without needing modern technology and only when they enter high school they might need along with that parents and students are informed and involved throughout the school year.

What finally strikes me about The Valley School, having spent a month observing and participating in its daily life, is that the most important contribution the school makes is not in terms of its educational philosophy but in terms of its everyday pedagogical practices. Over a span of decades the school builds a sense of physical and social space where they can be sensitive to self, towards nature and to others. The school environment here is students are not expected to be sensitive but are instead occasionally and repeatedly made able to be sensitive toward multiple elements, until being sensitive is internalised not by coercion but through everyday routine.

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