

**MGML AND PEDAGOGY IN RISHI VALLEY RURAL
EDUCATION CENTRE**

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Abstract

This study, conducted during a month-long fieldwork in June and July 2024, explores how Multilevel-Multigrade (MGML) pedagogy, inspired by Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophy of education without fear, addresses systemic challenges in rural education, including teacher shortages, multigrade classrooms, and low student retention rates. MGML replaces textbooks and examinations with activity-based, child-centred learning, allowing students to progress at their own pace. The study combines classroom observations and semi-structured and unstructured interviews with educators, administrators, parents, and students to investigate the methodology's philosophical foundation, practical implementation, and evolution over three decades. It also highlights the critical role of community involvement in curriculum design and school infrastructure. Despite its strengths, the MGML model faces persistent challenges, including pressures from government-mandated examinations and textbooks, parental expectations for conventional academic benchmarks, and competition from private schools. This study concludes that the MGML methodology effectively addresses the educational needs of resource-constrained villagers while creating a fear-free learning environment.

Keywords: Multigrade Multilevel (MGML), child-centred education, Rishi valley rural education centre (REC), Jiddu Krishnamurti, activity-based learning

Introduction

Within primary schools, learners are generally divided into grades. In most primary schools worldwide, a single teacher is responsible for a class of students from a single-year grade at any given time in the school day. This is called monograde teaching (Little, 2006, p.3).

However, this monograde classroom is being converted into a multigrade setting in response to various challenges. Many teachers in multi-grade environments, however, are either untrained or trained in monograde pedagogy (Little, 2006, p. 8). The objective of this paper is to examine and explore a similar kind of multigrade classroom teaching, but this multigrade setting is not a compulsion but a *choice-based pedagogy*.¹ Angela Little believes that multigrade pedagogy is as old as mankind and that the monograde classroom emerged only after the rise of colonial powers about 400 years ago (Little, 2006). The monograde classroom is the norm of the day, which is centred around a single textbook. In contrast, Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre (RIVER, see Fig. 1 for organizational information) has successfully implemented the multigrade approach, both as a pedagogical choice and a practical solution to rural challenges like teacher shortages, seasonal absenteeism of students in the harvesting season, low female enrolment and limited school access. This paper first examines the evolution and implementation of the MGML methodology by the RIVER, followed by the analysis of its ground-level realities, challenges, and features commonly absent in the traditional schooling system.

The Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre (REC), established in 1976, functions under the aegis of The Rishi Valley Education Centre (RVEC), an educational institution located in rural Andhra Pradesh, India. The Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre (REC) comprises Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources (RIVER), a residential Middle School for students from the immediate vicinity, seven Satellite Primary Schools, and two Pre-Primary Schools. REC is nestled in a sheltered valley in rural Andhra Pradesh, roughly 15 kilometres north of Madanapalle and 140 kilometres north of Bangalore. While RIVER, one ‘Satellite Primary

¹ It involves recognizing the flexibility that is required in the classroom keeping in mind the age group, and different learning abilities of the diverse student.

School’, a ‘Pre-Primary School’, and the ‘Middle School’ are housed on REC’s 14-acre campus, the remaining schools are spread over neighbouring hamlets².

Much before the inception of the Rural Education Centre (REC) in 1976, there was the Rishi Valley School founded in 1926 by Jiddu Krishnamurti, a renowned educationist and philosopher. The school aims to produce what Jiddu Krishnamurti describes as a ‘total human being’ and not just a technological human being (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 66)³. Jiddu

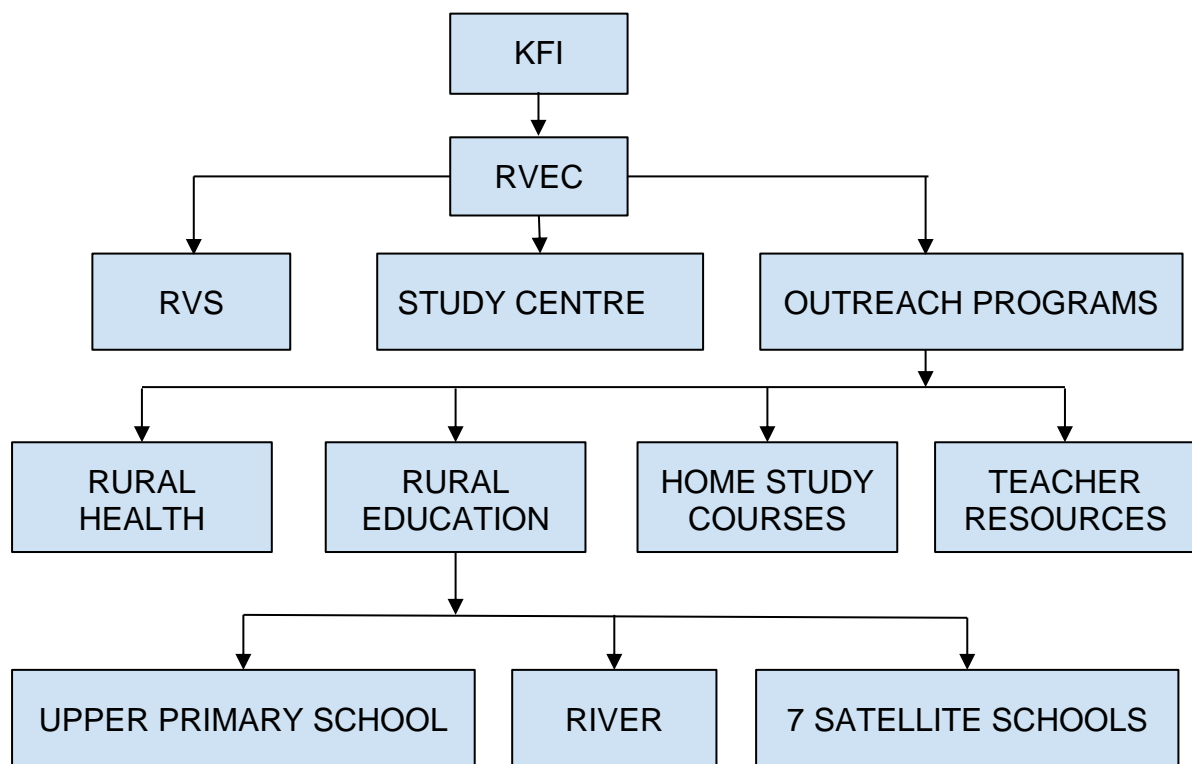


Fig.1 Organizational structure of Rishi Valley Education Centre (RVEC), Andhra Pradesh run by Krishnamurti Foundation India (KFI).

Krishnamurti always stressed the importance of rural education. Before he died in 1986, Jiddu Krishnamurti asked the school “What are you doing for the villages surrounding us?”, said

² <https://rishivalleyrec.org/our-story/#:~:text=Rishi%20Valley%20Rural%20Education%20Centre%20is,schools%20are%20spread%20over%20neighbouring%20hamlets> (Accessed on July 25, 2024).

³ When we talk about a total human being, we mean not only a human being with inward understanding, with a capacity to explore, to examine his inward being, his inward state, and the capacity to go beyond it, but also someone good in what he does outwardly (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 66).

Meenakshi Thapan, Director of RVEC⁴. The foundation of REC under the Rishi Valley Education Centre (RVEC) is one of the outreach programs that shows the promise of the Rishi Valley School, guided by Krishnamurti's vision, to give back to the community. In the 1980s, with the help of a Government of India grant, the school initiated a multigrade system that solved several problems of rural education. In 1986, Padmanabha Rao and Rama Anumula, a young couple, came to REC as volunteers⁵. Rama Anumula⁶, current director of RIVER, explained the rationale behind the methodology and how they developed this multigrade-multilevel system. Let's first understand how this methodology evolved over the decades, from the 1990s to the present day, and how it works today. This information was gathered by reading previous research papers on MGML methodology and conducting unstructured interviews with all the core team members and teachers of the RIVER.

When Rama Anumula and Padmanabha Rao joined REC, they surveyed the nearby villages in the late 1980s. They found that the literacy rate is significantly low in the surrounding villages, and villagers are facing several problems. The lack of schools in the surrounding villages, poor road infrastructure, lack of awareness of the importance of education among the parents, seasonal absenteeism of the students during the harvesting of crops, and high teacher absenteeism were the main issues.

Rama Anumula said that, despite finding many issues through the surveys, the first aim of the REC was to bring the students into the school and raise awareness among the villagers regarding the importance of education. To attract the students to the school, REC completely withdrew from the traditional schooling system by replacing textbooks with interactive activity cards based on rural stories, folk games, poems and legends. Examinations were removed from the schooling system till grade 4. The students were taught with the help of activities and games

⁴ Interview of Meenakshi Thapan was conducted on June 21, 2024.

⁵ This was told by Anil Duth, the curriculum coordinator in RIVER on July 11, 2024.

⁶ Rama Anumula, Director of RIVER, was interviewed on July 11, 2024.

prepared by the REC team. The objective was to create a school environment where students feel a sense of belonging, free from fear. “It was very flexible and child-centric in terms that the activities were designed based on the child’s needs and in such a way that is interesting for students”, said Rama Anumula.

However, identifying the activity cards was initially challenging for both teachers and students. To solve this issue, logos or symbols were introduced to help recognize the cards, and colour coding was introduced to differentiate between grades. For instance, birds represent Mathematics, mammals represent Language, and insects denote EVS. Similarly, red indicates Prep (Preparatory grade below grade 1), yellow corresponds to Grade 3, and so on. These activities were then arranged sequentially on a chart called *The Learning Ladder* (see Fig. 2).

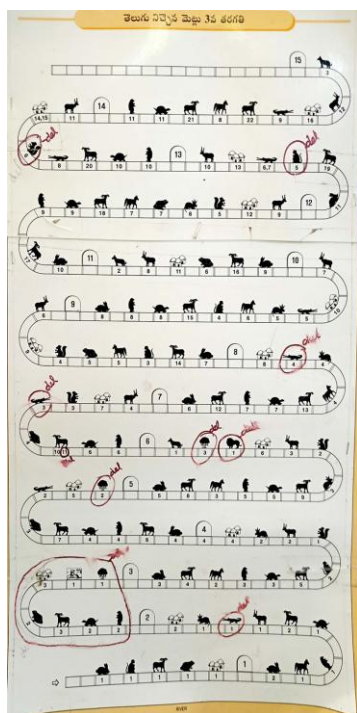


Fig. 2 Telugu Ladder
Class 3

Rama Anumula explained, “Some teachers approached us for training in MGML pedagogy and material preparation. They remarked that preparing these materials was time-consuming and suggested publishing the essential resources.” Acting on this suggestion, the REC published its first model in 1993, replacing traditional textbooks with activity cards. This approach (MGML) introduced a structured system. Each subject was organized into a learning ladder with a specific series of instructions for both teachers and students. This innovation eased the burden on teachers, who no longer needed to learn the details of every card;

they could simply rely on the logos and colours to identify the appropriate activity (see Fig. 2). The ladder for each subject is further divided into groups of activities called *milestones*. Each milestone represents a concept and is broken down into five types of activities: Introduction, Application, Assessment, Enrichment, and Remediation.

However, a challenge emerged when students completed their activities and had to wait for teacher guidance, making it difficult for one teacher to manage all the students at once. Then, this idea comes of making *groups*; The children are then divided into four (sometimes five) groups (see Fig.3) based on what kind of activities they are doing, such as:

1. The teacher-supported group with introductory activities or concepts
2. The partially teacher-supported group
3. The peer-supported group
4. The Self Learning group.

Rama Anumula explains that after the successful implementation of this methodology, many government schools and agencies approached REC to learn this. REC, then, established the Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources (RIVER) to train educators in the MGML methodology. Its

adoption in 14 of India's 28 states highlights its significant impact. It has been awarded numerous awards for its pioneering efforts, including the Jindal Prize in 2011 and the Global Development Network (GDN) Award in 2004, sponsored by the Japanese government⁷. RIVER's impact was famously acknowledged by UNESCO in 2003, NITI Aayog in 2016,⁸ and the New York Times in a 2018 article⁹ (Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre, n.d.).

Krishnamurti's Vision

Today, Multigrade teaching that arises through necessity is often considered a second-class education. However, in some cases, necessity has been transformed into a positive pedagogy (Little, 2006, p. 21). MGML methodology is one such comprehensive strategy that



Fig. 3 *Sitting arrangement for a Fully teacher-supported group based on the activities.*

⁷ <https://rishivalleyrec.org/river/> (Accessed on Oct 28, 2024)

⁸ <https://blog.mygov.in/final-list-of-shortlisted-social-innovations-ministry-of-external-affairs-niti-aayog-social-innovation-contest/> (Accessed on Oct 28, 2024)

⁹

<https://rishivalleyrec.org/river/#:~:text=RIVER%E2%80%99s%20MGML%20methodology,a%202018%20article> (Accessed on July 25, 2024)

involves curriculum development, teacher training, multigrade classes, school-community relations, and material preparation.

One of the most essential aspects of teacher-student relationships in a Krishnamurti school is the open quality of interaction without fear or prejudice (Thapan, 2018, p. 21). In his view, it was education alone that could provide freedom from the conditioning and the systems that perpetuate conflict, war, and violence (Thapan, 2022, p. 2). Krishnamurti focused on freedom from *conditioning*¹⁰ by religion, ideology and stressed sameness. This is an essential aspect of Krishnamurti's view: the fact that we are all interconnected, not defined by different nations, religions, terrains, and ideologies (Thapan, 2022, p. 4). The teacher and student should be engaged in dialogue and questioning. Krishnamurti held that the individual has agency, and young children have fresh minds without conditioning; hence, education (of the young children) alone can bring about change in society. Thus, Education should focus on self-inquiry, questioning, communication, and dialogue.

Jiddu Krishnamurti stated fear is what prevents the flowering of the mind, the flowering of goodness (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 36). He argues that fear, rooted in authority and obedience, suppresses independent thought. Fear is one of the foremost debilitating factors that hinders an individual's growth and is one of the cornerstones of mainstream competitive schooling in India (Thapan, 2018, p. 23).

For Krishnamurti, the acquisition of knowledge and learning are altogether two different things. Acquiring knowledge makes you mechanical, but learning makes the mind fresh and learning only comes into being when there is no fear and when there is no authority (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 37). Fear is essentially involved in competition. To be afraid of being nobody, of not arriving, of not succeeding, is at the root of competition, and so it seems to me

¹⁰ Conditioning is an unconscious process that shapes our beliefs, values, and identity based on social, cultural, and historical influences.

that it is the function of education to eliminate fear (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 37). Assessment is also generally experienced by students as an intimidating process that generates fear and leads to labelling and segregation based on marks that they have scored in tests and examinations, with significant social consequences (NCERT, 2023, p. 116). We learn the most when we have no fear. Thus, learning is when there is no fear, no authority, and no conformity. Krishnamurti didn't provide any blueprint or method to remove fear from the schooling process, however, we will see how RIVER has interpreted his philosophy and tried to bring it into practice.

The idea of Jiddu Krishnamurti of eliminating fear from the school also aligns with the aim of the National Curriculum Framework 2023. Evolving clear classroom norms that can be implemented ensures a sense of ownership among teachers and students rather than having a classroom function based on fear. Learning has to be joyful on the whole, and it requires seriousness, perseverance, and a lot of hard work. In a school, all this is achieved through teamwork, so students must learn to be socially sensitive and responsible (NCERT, 2023, p. 569). NCF 2023 mentions that Punishment and fear are detrimental to learning and must not be used in the classroom (p. 115). Once you see the fact that punishment and reward in any form are destructive, you never go back to them. By throwing them out, you are disciplined, and that discipline has come out of the freedom of examination (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 72). The core idea is that fear among learners hinders their learning process, which arises due to various reasons, from examination and punishment.

Krishnamurti always stressed that schools should be open to the community and that the learning process should not be limited to teacher and student but between parents, teachers, and students. In collaboration with parents and other key local stakeholders, teachers will also be more involved in the governance of schools/school complexes, including as members of the School Management Committees/School Complex Management Committees (NEP 2020, p. 21). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) emphasizes the need to root education in a

sense of pride in India by involving parents and communities in the educational process and by utilizing local resources in learning (NCERT, 2023, p. 35). This means education should go beyond the classroom, engaging with parents and communities to ensure it reflects local values and traditions.

Previous Studies on MGML

Herzberger (2018) traces the history of MGML methodology. Before the adoption of MGML methodology by the REC in the late 1980s, there was some kind of rudimentary experimentation with Multigrade classrooms in the Rishi Valley School (the fee-paying school) when Gordon Pearce was principal in the 1950s. Pearce recognized the limitations of conventional monograde classrooms and saw multigrade learning as a necessary step toward more effective education (Herzberger, 2018). However, this model was multigrade and not multilevel as it focuses on grouping by similar competency levels of the students. By the 1990s, Padmanabha Rao and Rama Anumula built upon these early experiments, addressing their limitations by developing a more structured version of Multigrade-Multilevel classrooms in the REC. Their innovation, the 'Learning Ladder', introduced a clear framework that not only supported self-paced, multilevel learning but also made it accessible to teachers with minimal training.

Thomas Muller (2018) discussed the philosophical basis of the MGML methodology. Very close to his death, Müller said that Krishnamurti made sure that the REC at Rishi Valley starts with small schools in the surrounding remote villages (Thapan, 2018, pp. 28-29). Müller argued that more than the methodology itself, it seems to be the attitude of the teachers that brings children as well as themselves 'in the driver's seat' and realizes that the schools run without fear—an aim Krishnamurti always focused on (Müller, 2018). Muller explained how the child learns at her own pace with only facilitation by the teacher. Müller described the classroom structure and, to some extent, the role of the teacher in the classroom.

Rohini Ram Mohan (2013) analyzed the pedagogy closely by giving examples of her classroom experience in satellite schools. She focused on challenges and ground realities that, despite the focus of the methodology on the teacher being a facilitator only, there were instances where the student depended on the teacher's direction completely (Ram Mohan, 2018). Hitesh Kukreja (2018) described the challenges of implementing MGML methodology in Uttarkashi schools and explored it as a potential solution to these issues. After the exploration of the MGML pedagogy (being implemented as a pilot in Uttarkashi), Kukreja examined the topographical and social contexts, which have a cascading effect on the running of schools in Uttarkashi (Kukreja, 2018). He studied the MGML methodology in 7 government schools in Uttarkashi and found that these schools are facing many challenges due to a lack of teacher training, and limitations of spaces and toolkits. He expressed in his conclusion that the teachers are the most neglected part of Indian education.

Framing the Research Questions

The rural education centre, established in 1976, gained renewed momentum in the 1980s with the arrival of Padmanabha Rao and Rama Anumula. However, there remains a need to examine whether the MGML methodology was primarily driven by the needs of rural communities or by Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophy, and to what extent these rural needs align with Krishnamurti's vision. This raises a critical research question: How does the integration of Krishnamurti's educational philosophy with the practical needs of rural communities¹¹ influence the development and implementation of the MGML methodology at the Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre. While Radhika Herzberger (2018) emphasizes the philosophical foundations of the MGML approach, I will further examine its development, driven both by philosophical principles and the practical needs of the rural community.

¹¹ When discussing the practical needs of the villagers, it primarily reflects the teachers' perceptions of what those needs entail.

In addition to the MGML methodology, the role of teachers and the physical structure of the classroom significantly impact student engagement and the achievement of child-centred education. This leads to a second research question: How does the role of teachers and the physical spaces of the classroom contribute to fostering a child-centred approach in RIVER schools?

Community involvement is another crucial aspect of MGML schools that deserves deeper exploration. While initiatives like *metric melas* and the use of community land for schools have been acknowledged in the past studies I mentioned earlier, there is scope to investigate how parents and local stakeholders contribute to shaping the curriculum, managing schools, and supporting the learning process. Accordingly, this study asks: What is the role and involvement of parents and the community in the methodology?

Lastly, the evolution of the MGML methodology faced challenges that threatened its ability to uphold its philosophy, such as state policy interventions, changing parental attitudes toward education, the attraction of parents toward private schools, and interactions with government schools to give them training in MGML. These tensions give rise to the final research question: What challenges do MGML schools face in upholding their educational philosophy amidst government interventions and competition from other schools?

Research Methods

This ethnographic study was conducted over a month of fieldwork, during which I explored the Multigrade Multilevel (MGML) methodology at the Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre (REC). The study employed a combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations¹².

¹² It is a casual discussion with the teachers, students, and parents (local shopkeepers as well) without any predetermined theme.

Initially, I approached the field with a set of broad themes and guiding questions aimed at understanding the philosophy, implementation, and challenges of MGML. These preliminary questions served as an entry point to build rapport with teachers and staff at the school. Over time (spending one week there), as trust was established, my interactions shifted to more fluid, conversational exchanges, allowing for deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. I also attended three K-Talk sessions:¹³ One with Prof. Thapan and two at the study centre with senior management and students.

Unstructured interviews with long-standing teachers and staff members—some of whom have been with the REC since the 1980s—played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. These interactions often occurred in informal settings, such as during tea breaks or mid-day meals and after school ends, and revealed nuanced views on the evolution of MGML, its practical implementation, and the challenges faced by teachers and other staff.

Classroom observations were conducted for 16 days, split between Vidyavanam, the primary satellite school on the REC campus, and Ashokavanam, located in the nearby village. These observations provided firsthand exposure to the MGML approach in action, including its child-centred classroom dynamics and activity-based teaching-learning materials (TLMs). I had informal discussions with senior students of grade 4 and above, who knew some English, whenever I used to visit the classroom to understand how they select their activities, complete tasks, and assess themselves.

The method was not confined to school premises; it extended into the surrounding community. I participated in village surveys, community events, and arts and crafts sessions, which offered a comprehensive view of how local culture and community participation inform

¹³ In Rishi Valley School (RVS), senior members like the Secretary, Director, Former Director, and Principal used to organize discussions with students and other staff on any topic educational philosophy of J. Krishnamurti.

the MGML curriculum. Informal discussions with parents, six alumni, and even local shopkeepers enriched my understanding of the school's role in the broader social fabric.

Krishnamurti's Philosophy in Action

Monograde classrooms have consistently failed in rural India to deliver quality education, according to Rama Anumula¹⁴. The latest edition of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023¹⁵ has revealed that more than half of 14 to 18-year-old children in rural India cannot solve a simple three-digit division problem that's usually taught in Classes 3-4. The issue lies within the traditional teaching methods. In a typical single-grade classroom, the teacher acts authoritatively, and a single textbook is central to the learning process. The teacher dictates, and students are expected to listen and replicate the work. It's a universal fact that no two children are the same (Little, 2006). How can a single textbook, then, be expected to meet the diverse competency levels of all students?

In the surrounding villages of the Rishi Valley, according to a survey conducted by Rao couples in the 1980s, students often missed classes due to family obligations or agricultural work. When they return, they struggle to catch up and become disengaged from school. Girls in the villages often need to take care of younger siblings, whom they cannot bring to school, leading to higher dropout rates for the young girls in the region. Additionally, children in the villages are accustomed to a playful and free social environment. When they enter the strict, regimented school setting, they feel their freedom is restricted, which leads to disenchantment with education

Guided by the philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti of giving back to the community, RVEC started a Rural Education centre in 1976 to teach rural children free of cost. Earlier, it was a volunteer-based outreach program. But when Rama Anumula and Padmanabha Rao

¹⁴ Rama Anumula expressed in our second meeting.

¹⁵ <https://asercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ASER-2023-Report-1.pdf> (Accessed on Aug 1, 2024).

joined REC, as I have discussed earlier, they devised a group of activities for children by replacing textbooks and examinations. With the help of villagers, they set up a satellite school on the REC campus. Rama Anumula explains that the initial days were challenging, as she and Padmanabha Rao had to handle all the work of preparing the activity cards on their own. They put the activities card on a chart in chronological order to guide the progress of students and to help teachers, called the learning ladder. Rama Anumula believes that if we help the teacher with the right kind of support, they will start teaching effectively. Local poems and culture were included in the curriculum of the school so that children would enjoy and relate the concepts to their real lives. For example, to teach letters to the prep students, popular English poems (which we usually see in books) are not taught, but instead, local poems that children hear from their parents and grandparents at home are included in the classroom to teach them letters and words. During a Telugu class at Vidyavanam, I observed two students reading a local poem about a nearby temple. The teacher told me that they already knew the poem, and it made it easier for them to learn to recognize letters. It was an attempt to connect the children with nature and their local culture. The learning is made enjoyable, teaching is made facilitating, not dictating, and the classroom is more interactive and democratic now, as held by Anil Duth. We will examine this point later in this paper.

“We are not running a school only, we are trying to build a model for others also so that they can follow and set up their school for rural children”, said Rama Anumula¹⁶. Many organizations and governments, including foreign and different state governments, approached the REC to learn this child-centric approach to reduce the dropout rate and deal with high teacher and student absenteeism. With the rise of high demands from outside, REC set up the RIVER to teach and train the teachers in MGML methodology and provide them with the right kind of support and skills to teach multigrade classrooms. The first successful program was

¹⁶ Rama Anumula, director of RIVER, was interviewed on July 11, 2024.

Activity-Based Learning in Tamil Nadu, which was a great success in 2007. Anil Duth said, “What we are doing is addressing the needs of the rural population of nearby villages; it is not the philosophy that is guiding us”. But the Director, Rama Anumula, was of the view that it is the philosophy of Krishnamurti, to a greater extent, which led to the invention of this methodology, and it was also the need of that time. Secretary Dr. Kumaraswamy said that it was both the philosophy of Krishna ji and the rural needs of nearby villages which led to the rise of this methodology. He was of the view that Krishnamurti’s philosophy is inclined towards the rural needs, but it is too demanding at the same time. He held that the implementation requires significant adjustments, like training the teachers, which will increase the financial burden on the school. He expressed his concern that if we go on to implement the philosophy on teachers who are local youths only, they will struggle to fulfill it and leave it. “Even we (teachers) here in RVS (fee-paying school) struggle to fulfill the philosophy of Krishnamurti, even though they are highly experienced teachers. So, we need to be pragmatic in following the philosophy of Krishnamurti in REC, said Dr Kumaraswamy. According to him, this is the reason they don’t enforce the philosophy on the teachers in REC, but it is there in practice.

The Director and Secretary of the RIVER, who were the pioneers in inventing and implementing the methodology, were always stuck to the educational philosophy of Krishnamurti, to the extent possible. Throughout the decades, their guiding force has been the educational philosophy of Krishnamurti. But when we look at the views of other staff of RIVER, like the curriculum coordinator, coordinator, and headmistress, they were less influenced by the philosophy; rather, rural needs are the main guiding force for them. The teachers of satellite schools never referred to Krishnamurti or his philosophy; rather, they are mostly focused on implementing the methodology mechanically. The philosophy meets the rural needs of the students in nearby villages. As we transition from administrative staff to

office bearers and then to teaching staff, the emphasis on philosophy declines and discussions focus more on real-life problems. Now, let's see how the philosophy of Krishnamurti is in practice there.

During his lifetime, Krishnamurti already pointed to the responsibility the team of RVEC has for the education of the people and children in the villages and the surrounding settlements in the valley (Muller, 2018, p. 279). To eliminate the fear of the schooling process, the Rural Education Centre has devised many approaches to teaching students. The MGML is not limited to the cards and activities only; it goes beyond classroom teaching and brings revolutionary changes in the curriculum of the school, which includes teacher training, regular orientation, regular updating of teaching-learning materials, and involvement of local culture in the school.

The teaching-learning materials (TLMs) for the prep (the preparatory stage before grade 1) students were prepared in June 2024, and the orientation program its implementation was conducted at the RIVER training centre. The Director of RIVER, Rama Anumula, was giving orientation to the teachers of satellite schools for the prep materials. These orientation programs are held regularly whenever Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) are updated. This program aims to make teachers aware of the rationale behind the changes. Also, the teachers of RIVER schools act as trainers for other government schools, which is why their understanding of methodology should be updated. When I asked the teachers why there is a need for the orientation program if they already have 30 years of experience in MGML methodology, Asha sir (a senior teacher who joined REC in the 1990s) replied, "Activities are the same, but the teachers need to understand some theoretical concepts, the rationale behind the activities, and the learning outcomes." Also, the RIVER has taken a small project in which the teachers will visit the centre from Delhi to learn the MGML methodology in August 2024. The teachers of REC will be giving them the training, and hence they need to be oriented to the new prep

materials so that they can train them. Thus, regular orientation is necessary for the teachers to update their knowledge. But it is also visible that orientation is required because the teachers at the REC are not only teachers but also trainers for other school teachers.

Now, the paper will delve into the other pedagogic innovations of RIVER, which, as a part of MGML methodology, contribute to fostering a child-centred approach.

To make learning playful, games are part of the curriculum. The teacher introduces the concepts by playing games outside the classroom. Students are allowed to make or draw anything and paste it into the classroom.



When the child completes any milestone, they get the chance to wear the crown (see Fig. 4) and become the 'King' or 'Queen' for the day, which marks their achievement. It also identifies the

Fig. 4 Student used to wear these paper crowns whenever they achieve the milestone.

student as an expert, and being the expert of the day, the 'king' or 'queen' faces classmates' questions and supports them with their tasks. This also reveals to the teachers if the child has actually learned and comprehended a skill as well as the content (Muller, 2018, p. 289). Once, I asked the 'queen' why she was wearing the crown. She softly replied, 'I learned addition.' The teacher said that the 'queen' would be guiding other students who are learning addition today. Apart from this, there is no incentive for the children, as it is against the philosophy of Krishnamurti. If we talk about becoming king or queen of the day, each child gets the chance to wear the crown when they complete the milestone.

Children are also encouraged to fill out their *daily mirror* (see Fig. 5), which is a small

ದಿನ	ಸಂಜೆ	ರಾತ್ರಿ	ದಿನ
1.	✓	✓	✓
2.	✓	✗	✓
3.	✓	✓	✓
4.	✓	✗	✓
5.	✓	✓	✓

Fig. 5 Daily Mirror Filled by Students

one-page document in which they mark their daily routine, whether they have brushed their teeth, bathed or not, etc. Teachers review at the end of the week to ensure they learn to brush

their teeth, wear clean clothes, and play well with others. Whenever I used to enter the

classroom in the morning, students of grade 1 used to bring their daily mirrors and used to show me. The students also prepare the weather chart daily in which they mention whether the day is cloudy, rainy, or hot with the help of diagrams (see Fig. 6).

Puppets, novels, folk art, folk songs, local myths and legends, and studies on village life and the natural environment are used to aid learning along with the card



Fig. 6 A student filling the weather chart at Ashokavanam

series in classrooms. The teachers use interactive methods to teach. For example, Kala Akka teaches (Grades 1 and 2) the student while giving unique facial and body actions like dancing and singing and doing mimicry as well. Once, she gave the example of Goddess Pochamma (folk goddess) while teaching Telugu, and students listened carefully because they could easily relate to Pochamma as they worshipped her daily.

Students are allowed to ask anything inside the classroom. I remember one student fell asleep in the classroom, but the teacher left him like this only until he woke up by himself. Students are allowed to roam here and there inside the class for some time when they are bored. The teacher used to ask them to sit and study, but never scolded them. Any sort of punishment has been eliminated here. Now, let's look at the peer interaction among the students.

There is a distinct form of peer interaction visible inside the classroom. There is a peer-supported group where experienced students used to teach the newer ones, but still, they are learning individually. Apart from the class interaction, the peer interaction outside the classroom is also unique. The older children take care of the younger ones like their own siblings. "These are young children, and their minds are not yet conditioned. They live like siblings, but we are not able to withhold this ability when they become old and go to upper primary school", said Anil Duth when the school got over at 4 PM and older students were taking the younger children to their homes by holding their hands. Students are also allowed to

bring their young siblings inside the classroom, which encourages parents to send their female children to the school along with younger siblings they are entitled to care for. A girl in grade 4 used to bring her 3-year-old younger brother to the classroom, who used to sit with her only. They can both study at their own pace while sitting together. In this way, the learning is made fun here without any element of fear among the students. Thus, the RIVER schools are following this idea of joyful learning and learning with play, which has been mentioned in the National Curriculum Framework 2023, for decades.

Exploring the Child-Centered Approach of the MGML System

“The failure of monograde classrooms is clearly visible, especially in rural India. Most of the teachers want to work in cities; hence, the villages are left with youths who are not well

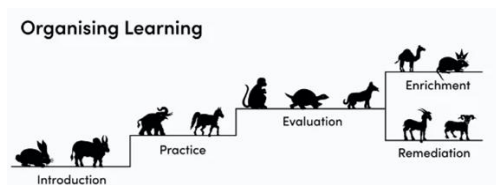


Fig. 7 Personalized learning progression in MGML methodology

qualified”, said Rama Anumula. She argues that training local youth in the MGML methodology would eliminate the need to rely on teachers from outside the village. RIVER has trained the village

youths in MGML methodology to handle the multigrade classrooms by providing adequate resources.

It is visible that RIVER has deconstructed the textbook and examination in the school till grade 4 and converted the learning material into activity cards containing local culture like local folks, temples and stories. As I have explained earlier, these activity cards were systemized into a chart known as a learning ladder. The activities are further grouped into several milestones. Each child carved her path on the ladder at her own pace of learning. The conventional grading system (giving marks to the students) is not applicable here. Each milestone represents a particular concept. Each milestone has different types of activities (see Fig. 7): Introduction, Application, Evaluation, Enrichment, and Remediation. The introduction

of the concept is usually done by the teacher in the teacher-supported group, and then students learn the application of the concept by real-life examples. For instance, mathematics concepts are taught by using stones, seeds, and real-life calculations (See Fig. 8). Concepts like addition and subtraction are introduced to the students outside the class by playing with them. Here is an example of what I observed in Ashokavanam (see Fig. 9) on July 10 in the Mathematics period.



Fig. 8 A student of Grade 2 learning numbers with the help of stones.

The teacher brought the sheep mask and gave it to 5 senior students in Grades 4 and 5.



Fig. 9 The teacher is introducing the mathematics concepts outside the classroom.

All the other students were made to sit on the ground outside in 3 rows. Then, the teacher made a circle in front of them and asked the 5 senior students to come one by one by acting like sheep. These students come one by one and stand beside the teacher (3 on one side and 2 on the other side), and then the teacher explains to the student

which is greater and smaller. And then they asked students to add them.

This way, the study is made fun and joyful as well. Then, there is an activity that helps the student with self-evaluation, and based on the evaluation, there are remediation and enrichment activities for the student.

Teachers track student progress and adjust tasks as needed. There is a *buffer time* between certain milestones so that the ‘slow learners’ can reach the same level, and ‘fast learners’ can work on advanced enrichment activities to improve their skills. The buffer time ensures that there will not be too much gap among the students inside the classroom. Hence, “there is focus on the last child in the classroom, even the child who is a slow learner, and not on producing toppers”, held Rama Anumula. The terms ‘slow learner’ and ‘fast learner’ are

used frequently by the teachers at REC based on the time taken by students to complete each milestone. This tag of slow and fast seems to be creating a hierarchy among the students. When I was talking to a student in grade 5, a student suddenly pointed out toward other students and said, “Sir Ji, he is very slow”. This type of tagging students as fast and slow seems to be against the philosophy of Krishnamurti. Now, let’s move to the other pedagogic innovations of the MGML.

Different Components of the MGML Methodology

As I have already mentioned, this methodology is not limited to the cards and ladder only. It is only one part of it. The methodology has different components: the Learning Ladder, the Teacher, and the Physical structure of the classroom. These three are the most important parts of the methodology, which can’t be separated from one another. “If the teacher is keen and clear, he doesn't need any method as such. He can devise his own method to teach”, said Rama Anumula. A similar viewpoint was expressed by Anil Duth, the curriculum coordinator. So, the teacher is the key person; without a motivated and trained teacher, the methodology will fail. “That’s why the main aim of RIVER is to provide the teacher relevant training and support”, Rama Anumula.

The activities replacing the textbook and examination and put into the form of a Learning Ladder for self-evaluation are the core of the methodology. However, the role of the teacher and the physical structure of the classroom are also very important and play a crucial role in promoting what Krishnamurti used to call *education without fear*. When one enters the classroom, one can see the four or five small tables around which the children are seated on the ground in different groups according to their activities, and not according to their grades. There is no fixed place for teachers to sit or stand, and hence, the hierarchy is reduced to a greater extent between the pupil and the teacher. But in practice, the teacher sometimes used to bring a chair or table to the classroom and sit in one corner, which demarcated the teacher’s place as

different and hierarchically above the students. Krishnamurti talked about removing fear from the classroom, though he didn't provide a clear blueprint on how to do it. In response to this, RIVER has adopted several mechanisms to bring both teachers and students to the same level.

The teacher used to sit among the students and casually move around the classroom. Any sort of physical and mental punishment has been eliminated, pupils are allowed to play in between classes. Teachers are trained not to scold students when they play or make noises. Teachers here believe that learning can't be done with punishment or by authority; the wish for learning should emerge from the learner's side. If the pupil doesn't want to learn, no one can teach him, said Radhika Herzberger. Learning should be made fun; that's why the games are incorporated as a part of the syllabus here. There is a break of 15 minutes after each period, which is again utilized by the children for playing. Teachers also used to accompany them sometimes. However, during my ten visits to Vidyavanam, I observed the teacher sometimes scolding or giving orders to the students for making too much noise, which contrasts with the philosophy of Krishnamurti. REC has tried to maintain no authority in the schools, but it is visible that some kind of authority exists. Students used to call the male teachers *Sir* and the female teacher *Akka*. They even used to call me 'Sir' and whenever I entered the classroom, they used to greet me by calling 'Sir' or 'Sir Ji'. Sometimes, they used to salute me as well. This suggests that students perceive teachers—and even external visitors—as occupying a higher hierarchical status. This distinction between teacher and students gets sharpened when we move to grade 4 and grade 5, where the teacher used to sit at one fixed place and teach the students. This spatial segregation depicts the teacher's higher status over the students.

There were hanging objects inside the classroom made by teachers with the help of students and parents. In the classroom, each student had a blackboard positioned at their height, where they could write or create drawings as they wished. All the study materials and Teaching-learning materials (TLMs) were kept at the students' height so they could access them easily.

The structure of the classroom is similar to that of small houses in the villages (see Fig. 10).

There is no school dress or any form of dress code in the school, nor are there any kind of rules



Fig. 10 *Students of grades 2 and 3 sitting in one classroom in Vidyavanam*

regarding the behaviours of the students.

These spaces and informal classrooms make the pupil feel like it is their home. This

comfort is crucial to retaining the child in

school. The prep students are allowed to do anything they want for one month when

school reopens in June. They usually play for

the whole month. “This is to retain them in the

school; once they are settled here, then we give them some activities for teaching”, said Basha

Sir. Also, Saturday is dedicated to the students. On that day, there were no classes, and students

were allowed to study anything they wanted, whether it was poems, stories, or any subject, or

play any game. Teachers also bring some locally collected poems and stories to tell the

students. During the weekdays, students are allowed to recite the poems and stories that they

have heard from their parents or grandparents in the assembly. During one of the visits to

Vidyavanam on 6th July, I observed one such event in the assembly:

When the teacher, Kala Akka, asked the students to recite a poem or story during the assembly, one student eagerly raised her hand and began narrating a tiger story she had heard from her mother.

To captivate the other students, Kala Akka mimicked a tiger with her facial expressions and hand movements. Following this, four more students shared their own stories, each acting out the characters

from their tales. The storytelling session was highly engaging, with every student actively participating by embodying the figures in their stories. The teacher played a crucial role in keeping the students

engaged, not by giving orders, but through playful methods like mimicry and acting.

Thus, the role of a teacher is not limited to managing the classroom only. The teacher is required to maintain a record of each student in the form of Core Minimum Determinants

(CMD),¹⁷ which keeps the data of each student on how many days they are completing each milestone.

Apart from the self-evaluation of the student, teachers used to assess the student by conducting a *baseline test* at the beginning of the session and preparing a separate truncated ladder to cover the earlier backlogs before starting the new session. The school opened on 15 June 2024, and just like every year, the initial 45 days are for revision. When asked the rationale behind keeping this revision period, one of the teachers replied, “At the end of the academic year, many students are not able to complete the ladder. So, we will keep a revision period of 45 days at the start of the next academic year to cover the backlogs. The fast learners used to do some advanced logical activities during this revision period.

COVID-19 was a disaster for these students as they missed two years of schooling, and when they returned to school, they forgot everything. But the RIVER was prepared for this. “We already knew that when they (students) return after the lockdown, they will forget everything. And we can’t keep them in the same class because parents will not be ready for that. They see progress in terms of only progression of class”, said Kumaraswamy. That’s why RIVER developed Special Learning Support Material (SLSM), and teachers used to make *Truncated Ladders*¹⁸ for each student to cover the backlog. When I asked Basha about the slow learners and fast learners in the class, he immediately pointed out a student and said, “This boy, he is very weak in all the subjects. He is in grade 5 but is still unable to solve the grade 1 activity. So, I have made a separate truncated ladder for him to cover the backlogs, at least the basics”. But the student needs to attend the regular lectures as well, along with covering backlogs. I asked Kumaraswamy why there was a need to do the two activities at the same

¹⁷ CMD reflect the minimum learning outcomes a student must demonstrate to be considered as having mastered a level or unit. CMDs are used to design learning ladders, evaluate student progress, and help children move at their own pace.

¹⁸ It is a special kind of ladder designed specially by the individual teacher taking care of the needs (pace of learning) of individual students to cover the backlogs, if any.

time: backlogs and current going on the syllabus. Isn't it contrary to the MGML philosophy, which emphasizes that children should learn at their own pace? Kumaraswamy wasn't very clear about why it's happening, but he said they can't keep a student in the same class because parents wouldn't accept it. They might take their child out of the school and send them to a government school, where, according to him, learning is zero.

Thus, the core philosophy behind the MGML methodology is at stake here. The school is struggling with its philosophy and the demands made by parents. "Earlier, when we used to go to the parents and talk to them, they became ready to teach their child in the same class again, but now they are obsessed with this private school system and want to promote their child in the next class every year", said Kumaraswamy. He believed if the school enforced the philosophy on the parents, they would quit, so we need to be pragmatic also while following the philosophy. This increases the burden on the school and the teachers to cover the backlogs alongside the current ongoing syllabus. Thus, one can say that the role of the teacher can't be separated from this methodology.

Involvement of the Community in the Schooling Process

One of the tasks of the RIVER is to reduce the educational alienation of the parents¹⁹. J. Krishnamurti has considered the teacher as well as the parents, school and home to be responsible for the best development of the child (Kumar, 2024). One of the most vital recommendations of the NEP is that parents should be considered equal partners in the teaching-learning process (Mukherjee, 2023)²⁰. RIVER has developed the curriculum based on locally relevant knowledge, skills, and information, considering the child's context. Through a process of "trans-creation", key concepts such as language, mathematics, health, and

¹⁹ [https://www.rishivalley.org/rural-education-centre#:~:text=Rishi%20Valley%20Institute%20for%20Educational%20Resources%20\(RIVER\)%20is%20the%20teacher,on%20the%20Rishi%20Valley%20campus](https://www.rishivalley.org/rural-education-centre#:~:text=Rishi%20Valley%20Institute%20for%20Educational%20Resources%20(RIVER)%20is%20the%20teacher,on%20the%20Rishi%20Valley%20campus) (Accessed on 18 July 2024).

²⁰ <https://www.educationworld.in/schools-make-parents-involvement-compulsory/> (Accessed on 18 July 2024).

environmental awareness are reimagined in a set of relevant and meaningful experiences rooted in local events, history, culture, and customs²¹. Parents are occasionally called into the school to see the progress of their children. In *Metric Mela*²², which is a community math festival, children show their skills to their parents and the community. Rama Anumula explained how they used to visit their parents in the 1990s, told them about the benefits of education, and explained to them the importance of playful learning. Slowly, the parents began to trust the school and send their children to the school, and now, it's been almost three decades, and every village has trust in the school. Teachers used to visit the parents in case the child was absent from school for a longer time. "Earlier in the 1990s, when the children used to come to school, they had runny noses and improper dress. Then we went to the villagers and explained to them the importance of cleaning and bathing, and gave them soap also each month", said Kumarasamy. There was even a bathing area in the school for those who had come to school without having a bath. The teachers are also from the local villages and are used to discussing with the parents about the child's progress regularly. Parents are allowed to come to the classroom anytime and see what the children are doing. Parents are also allowed to teach the students some stories, poems, puppetry shows, or anything they want. This engagement with the parents in the schooling process began with the foundation of the school. Krishnamurti also pointed out the need for engaging the villages in the school system.

First of all, I would get all the villagers together and explain to them that we're going to have schools for their children. We'll see that we get enough money; we'll work for it. We'll say: 'We'll build; you help us to build'. That's one thing I would do: schools for them. (Krishnamurti Foundation India, 2011, p. 1, as cited in Muller, 2018, p. 279)

²¹ <https://rishivalleyrec.org/the-methodology/#:~:text=The%20curriculum%20based,culture%2C%20and%20customs> (Accessed on 18 July 2024).

²² A community math festival where students measure the height and weight of their parents and other villagers.

As held by Krishnamurti, the team of RIVER went to the villagers, and with their help, the REC built 16 satellite schools in surrounding villages (Now it has reduced to 7 satellite schools). The community gave the land to build the schools and even participated in the building process as well. Whenever there is a need for renovation of the school building, Anil Duth said, the villagers are also called for help. Sometimes the students who have passed out from the school, who are doing jobs now, used to provide some necessary stuff needed for children in the school. For example, recently, in the third week of July 2024, some older students came and provided water cans for each school.

As the schools are built on the community land, it is the duty of parents also to protect the school. “If someone took or destroyed the study materials from the classroom, it is their (villagers) loss only, so they used to protect the vicinity of the schools. They constantly keep a watch if any stranger is coming inside the schools”, said Anil Duth. Parents also used to keep a watch on the teachers to see if they came into the school regularly or not. They are also included while making the curriculum and activity cards. They share the local stories and legends, and other relevant materials that are used in the classrooms. The older generation of the village is also called into the classroom to teach their traditional knowledge sometimes.

Recently, on 13 July 2024, there was a village survey in which all the students of Grades 3-5 went to the nearby village of *Eguvapalli*. The students were divided into groups headed by Grade 5 students. These students collected information about local agriculture and other plants, the number of cows and goats, local stories and poems, seeds, and other relevant objects that will be needed in the upcoming academic year. This survey was mainly aimed at giving the students a practical insight into their surroundings. The teachers will make a report of the survey and paste it into the classroom in the form of interactive charts every year. The villagers were very welcoming of these children, and many of the ex-students also participated in the survey (see Fig. 11). Thus, the villagers have faith in the school, and they are equal

shareholders in the school. The NEP 2020 talks about the inclusion of parents in the schooling process, but this has been in practice in REC for decades.

Intervention of Government and Other Challenges

There are many challenges for schools today. The first is the intervention of the government in the schooling process. The multigrade classroom doesn't work on the principle of a fixed grading system, but the government does. Indeed, MGML teaching was constructed as the facilitation of students' learning, emphasizing their readiness to learn. In most schools, teachers are expected to teach according to a state-set syllabus guide with portions (syllabus content) that should be completed each month (Kumar, 1988). However, REC schools don't



Fig. 11 Village survey done by students of Vidyavanam and Ashokavanam on 13 July 2024 along with teachers.

follow the guidelines of the government as a hard-and-fast rule. “Similarly, we do have such kinds of things, but we are not hard and bound”, said Anil Duth, curriculum coordinator. He explains that there is an estimated number of days in which a particular milestone needs to be completed; if the student fails to complete it, then we find where the problem is,

whether it is the teacher or the student, and try to find a way ahead. If a student is absent for a longer duration, they are given additional time upon their return to complete their milestone at their own pace. There are Formative assessments mandated by the government that require students to take a test four times a year and upload the marks on the government website. But what they do is prepare the question paper by themselves based on what the student has learned, not what has been taught in the class. Sreevalli, the headmistress, explained that formative assessment is not the problem, as this is under the school only. “They (government officials)

said that if we exempt you from the examinations, then everybody will come and demand exemption from the examination, citing various reasons. So, if the examination system is not harming you in any way, then what is needed to exempt it? You follow your own methodology; nobody is stopping you”, said Anil Duth. So, there is this informal consensus between the RIVER team and the government officials that examination is only for government purposes, it is not strictly imposed on the schools here.

“Government officials come regularly here in middle school for surveys, but they rarely visit the primary school (where the MGML methodology is followed)”, said Sreevalli. But the school also has this type of manual and assessment done by teachers, which is known as Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation (CCE)”, said Rama Anumula. The state government provides a midday meal facility to the school, and REC is the only private school to receive this benefit. Thus, the government also has some demands, like regular online attendance and following the state curriculum. “We earlier had our own curriculum, but now we are following the national curriculum so that it becomes easy for other schools to adopt our methodology”, said Rama Anumula. So, there is a constant struggle with government policies, and according to Kumaraswamy, any change in government directly affects the school. But the RIVER school follows its own evaluation pattern strictly by just fulfilling the needs of the government.

Apart from the challenges faced by government policies, RIVER faces many other challenges as well. “Many private schools have contacted us, but somehow our commitment rests with the disadvantaged section of society”, said Anil Duth. Thus, RIVER mainly coordinates with government schools. “And you know how the government teachers are, it is very tough to train them in one week”, said Rama Anumula. “If we are giving them a training of one week, we can’t expect much of them”, said Kumaraswamy. “So, we need to take care of them also”, said Rama. There are many alternative schools in India, and Rishi Valley is not

an exception. But what RIVER has done differently is that they have invented a model that can be implemented anywhere in the world easily with the help of the community. This pedagogy requires a sufficient amount of training for both teachers and curriculum developers. To help the teachers is important before helping the students.

Rama Anumula said that when a team of RIVER went to Nali Kali schools in Karnataka to see how the MGML methodology was working there, they were shocked as they found a huge gap between the students. The teachers' focus was on producing toppers only, and the students who were at the bottom were neglected and not given any kind of support from the teacher. The whole idea that we need to look at the needs of the last child inside the classroom was at stake there. That's why RIVER introduced the concept of *buffer time* to bridge/reduce the gap between the students after visiting the Nali-Kali schools. She explained that we don't need buffer time, but it is very tough to teach the government school teachers. "They always find some loopholes, but there are people who, if given the support, teach well", said Kumaraswamy. He said that if we see the success of Nali Kali in absolute terms, then it is a failure, but relatively, when the methodology was not there for hundreds of years, it is indeed a success. This buffer time has been put in so that other government schools don't face difficulty when there is a large gap in the competency level of students inside the classroom. RIVER schools originally did not require buffer time because their well-trained teachers effectively kept all students on the same track. However, due to the influence of government schools, they have now introduced buffer time into their curriculum. RIVER schools initially had their own curriculum, but they have adopted the state government curriculum to align with other government schools. Thus, the functioning of RIVER schools is also affected by the needs of the other government schools.

Other challenges include the valorization of private schools these days, with uniforms, huge infrastructure, and buses etc. Parents are keen to send their children to these private

schools as it is a way to build status. “But there are villagers who have faith in us, and thus they send their children to us because they know that we are doing good”, said Anil Duth. With the introduction of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, the Central RTE rules mandated that a primary school must be established within a one-kilometre radius and an upper primary school within three kilometres. Thus, there is a sharp rise in the government primary schools (many private as well) in the surrounding villages of Rishi Valley. That’s why RIVER has shut down its many satellite schools, and now it is reduced to 7. “When you have a private school and a government school, friction usually starts. At that point, there’s no reason to stay unless we are willing to compete with the government.”, said Anil Duth. Due to migration and other reasons like reducing the fertility rate, many schools have fewer than 10 children, hence, they were merged. For instance, the satellite school in *EguvaPalli*, where we went for a village survey on 13 July, was shut down because most of the children were going to a government school that was opened nearby.

The whole idea of success revolves around passing a grade each year. Thus, parents want their children to pass a grade each year. If a child has not completed the ladder, still the school cannot stop the children in the same grade due to parents’ demands. Thus, RIVER school has devised the mechanism of a 45-day revision period at the start of the academic year. The teacher makes a truncated ladder for each student based on the baseline test. Though many parents have faith in the school because most of them have studied here and now they are sending their children to the same school, most of the parents measure success in terms of passing a grade each year and in terms of marks and scores, which contradict the philosophy of the MGML.

Conclusion

So, it is clear the invention and the evolution of the MGML methodology have been the result of the amalgamation of Krishnamurti’s educational philosophy and the urge to solve

the rural needs of the villages surrounding the Rishi Valley School. While Krishnamurti's ideals of 'giving back to the villages' have been the central guiding force behind this innovation, the rural needs of the population have been taken care of because the philosophy of Krishnamurti is too demanding that it can't be applied as it is. The founders of the MGML methodology have been very vocal about the philosophy of Krishnamurti, while the teachers of REC or RIVER schools are more interested in solving ground-level problems (as they are trained to do) rather than following any philosophy.

The child-centered approach of the MGML has been discussed in detail. The MGML is considered to be child-centered because it provides room for pupils to learn at their own pace without fear of any exam or punishment. The physical space of the classroom is pupil-friendly and gives the impression that local cultural materials, games, and study materials are kept at the easy accessible to the pupils. The pupils find their local culture in the curriculum of the school, which gives them a home-like feeling and saves them from being alienated. The teachers are an important part of this MGML methodology. There is space for teachers to innovate new methods of teaching, and they can also add/modify some content of the textbook according to the needs of the students for which they are trained as well.

The involvement of villages, especially the parents, in the schooling process, which was earlier wishful thinking, has been well implemented by the RIVER schools. Right from the building of a school to its management and curriculum formation, parents are involved, especially mothers.

However, the RIVER schools are not free from any challenges. As new private schools are opening with heavy corporate-like infrastructure, the parents are being attracted towards them. Parents, nowadays, measure the success of their ward with the number of classes he/she passed. Hence, they force the RIVER school to promote their student each successive year, which affects the child's learning pace. The other major challenges include the intervention of

the government machinery. The government is trying to impose its textbook, examination system, and admission process on the RIVER schools, which is affecting their methodology. However, with the negotiation with government officials, RIVER can function with the least intervention from the government.

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