

### Vanakkam Aikiyam Friends

The 2014-15 school year finished on April 15, and already the summer holidays are coming to a close. I have just returned, along with ten of our seventh graders from ten days of intensive trekking at Auroville Nature Camp, Kavunji, Kodaikanal. The office is filled with new books, which the children and parents are picking up so they can cover them in preparation for the next school year which begins on June 15.

The new building, which we started in January, is growing, and we hope it will be finished in December. We also have the funds for a second building which we hope can begin in August. We will be a little crowded this year, as we have to tear down an old building with 2 classrooms to make place for the new one, but by this time next year we will have plenty of space.



Auroville Nature Camp

A very important part of Aikiyam's curriculum is the teaching of Tamil (also transliterated as Thamizh), the mother tongue of our students. From the first to eighth grades all the students study Tamil as a subject for one hour per day.

Recently Tamil teacher, **Arulmozhi** spoke with administrator Laura about her work:



I enjoy working here because I am teaching a subject that I like and know. People from rural communities often do not speak the language well, so the students here do not know proper Tamil, but I do my best. In 8th grade, I give more reading assignments to students because they

The teachers are busy preparing their classrooms and discussing the programme for the new academic year. It's a time filled with excitement and anticipation. We hope you will enjoy reading about the progress of our students in this newsletter.

Aum...Shankar



Construction Progressing



will be graduating. I give more individual help to students with problems and this does help them to make progress. There are problems for all of the students because at home the pronunciation is not correct and so in class the students speak very slowly.

I give all of my students a chance to speak in class about different topics I pick. I choose topics about what happens at home. For example, food at home, questions about growing and preparing food, research on the internet (in Tamil script) about Tamil food customs and recipes. Then when they have done their idea gathering, each student comes back to class and gives a speech.

The biggest difficulty for these students is to speak before a group. Some students are good but even these have difficulties speaking out, and some never speak out in class, so I give them more support. I give them a passage to prepare to read for the next day. Interestingly, in all of my classes, the boys have more difficulties than the girls. I feel that girls respect the teachers more; they listen and do their work more.

Sometimes we have classes in the Library using library books to research the current topic I have given. Sometimes they choose a book to find a topic to present in the classroom and this interests them.

One day, I had my 5th- 8th grade classes write about, "Why I like or don't like to study Tamil." Many wrote that they didn't like it because they were not good at it. Since the students' handwriting was not good, I had them write in a tiny size and there was great improvement.'

Shankar adds that most of the seventy-two million people in Tamil Nadu speak only Tamil, so it is necessary to know the language well, not only to communicate, but because the language is a container of the culture. The way a people think is reflected in their language. If the children do not learn Tamil they lose the connection to the ancient wisdom and knowledge of the culture. Tamil is one of the longest surviving classical languages of the

world, with manuscripts surviving that are more than 2000 years old.

யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்  
தீதும் நன்றும் பிரர் தர வாரா  
நோதலும் தணிதலும் அவற்றோரன்ன.....

Translation

Every village is my village and every person is my kin. Like a lot of things in life, good and bad cannot be attributed to others ... they come from within each of us. Likewise, agony and relief of agony come not from any external triggers but from within us.

Written by Kaniyan Poongundran approximately 2000 years ago

Art has always been an important part of the program at Aikiyam. All of the children from grade one to grade eight take at least two hours of art per week, and if they choose it as an optional subject, it can be more. The school currently has two different, yet complementary, approaches to art. Ramalingam teaches representational or realistic art, and Tia's classes are a combination of art therapy and integral art. Sadly Tia has just resigned from the school to teach at the Delhi Ashram School, but we are fortunate to have found another person to continue the approach she has introduced.

Sometimes I take workshops in Auroville, for example on free-play painting, and then use the ideas in my classes. The fresh, new ideas I bring are clearly stimulating for the students! I always aspire to do my work better and to create beauty. Fine arts must come from deep within. In Tamil we say "Hirudhayam irukkaa?" which translates as, "Does it have Heart?"

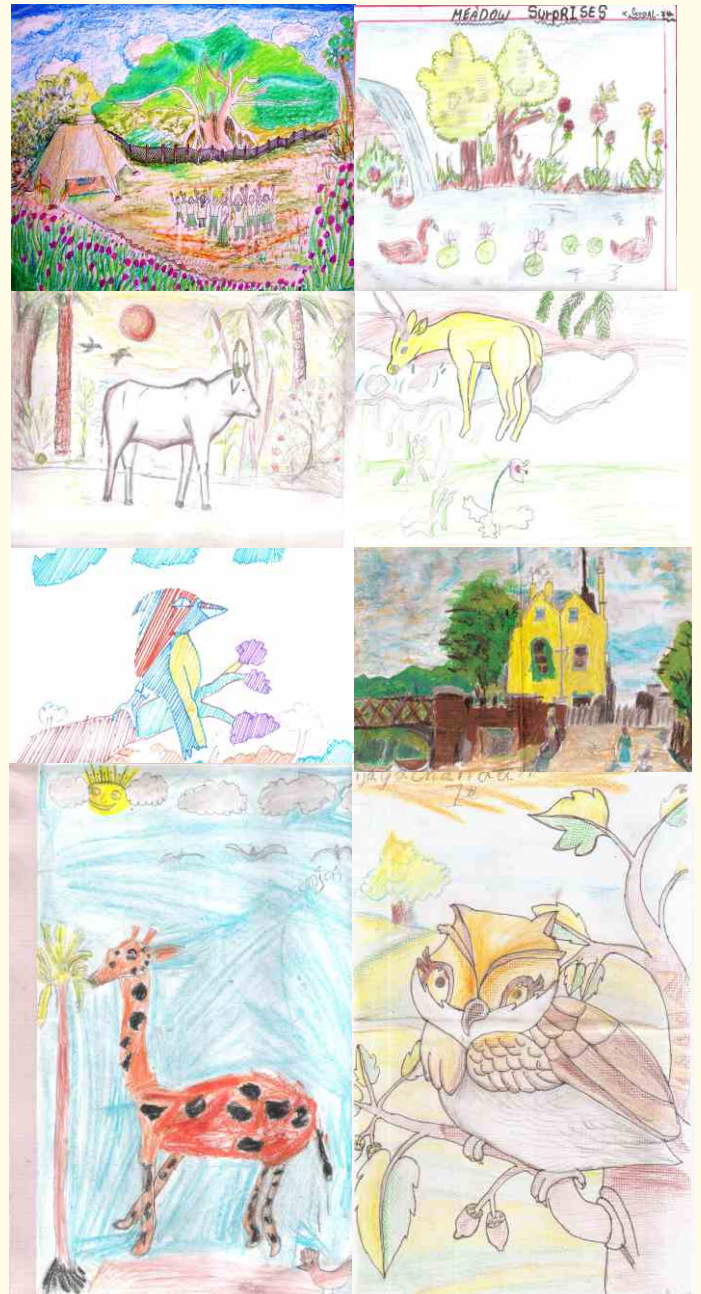


Ramalingam and Students

Art teacher, **Ramalingam** came to the school in 2000, when the previous art teacher left. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts, and has studied both Indian and world art. His studies included painting, drawing, applied art and sculpture.

In his course the students begin by making lines - straight lines, curved lines, and zigzag lines, then shapes, and then they make compositions. It is very important to be able to make realistic representation, says Ramalingam, especially if one wants to become an architect or an engineer, and all of the school subjects include art.

He says: what I like best about my job is to help the children develop by constantly bringing in new ideas. Sometimes children with behaviour problems, or who are behind academically do very well in art, and this gives them confidence, and then their behaviour and academic class work improves. I get some of my inspiration from friends, who are teaching at the university. I also read specialized literature about teaching fine arts to children.





Tia and Students

Five years ago **Tia**, an art therapist, with a different approach to art joined our staff to provide a space for Art Therapy and Integral Art ( the combination of Integral Education and Art Therapy). She says: I worked developmentally within the early childhood realm with the Creche and Kindergarten, and I had the opportunity to provide avenues for self-exploration, reflection, interpersonal growth and the development of literacy skills through the creative process with grades one through eight, working with children on both an individual and group level.

I took the traditional learning experience out of the text book and brought it to life, bringing excitement, creative thinking, problem solving and hands on experiences. Students created their own books, wrote about their art and expressed their thoughts and feelings in words which enhanced and improved their English literacy skills, in addition to the ability to communicate what was in their hearts and heads.



The developmentally appropriate projects and avenues of creative expression we covered are too numerous to list, but underneath the physical expression of art was the creation of many relationships with both



teachers and students. We explored colors, shapes, communities, concepts such as peace and cooperation, and we explored feelings and emotions, and learned that we can work collaboratively together as unique individuals.

I feel a great sense of accomplishment in transforming the concept of 'Special Needs' to that of a more positive and more reflective concept of 'Supportive Learning'. Supportive Learning meant to me....bringing to light the philosophy that all children learn differently, and that each child has individual needs in order to be able to learn. Each person is an artist and is able to create in his/her own way, when provided with the methods, materials and guidance to express themselves freely.

### Tia says thank you to Aikiyam

It has been an incredible experience, creatively, culturally, intellectually, professionally and spiritually. I have grown in so many ways along with the students and teachers. I will miss Aikiyam School, its students and teachers, its international army of volunteers that add so much enrichment to the overall curriculum and school as a whole. This is what I will cherish and hold dear to my heart. I am grateful for the creative freedom I have been provided, the openness, eagerness and trust of the students of all ages to express themselves and explore the world of art and creativity along with me. Thank you Aikiyam School for this amazing experience!  
With love and Gratitude, Tia Pleiman

**Marion**, who works at the new Teachers' Centre at SAIER, and is a member of Aikiyam School Support Group, has introduced a phonics-based reading program, called *Fantastic Phonics* to Aikiyam. Here is what she says about it:

Just about a year ago I was part of a conversation concerning the improvement of English for students in the Tamil outreach schools as well as students in Auroville schools for whom English is not their mother tongue. We needed to find a programme which matched the three criteria of appropriacy, affordability and sustainability. Aikiyam School expressed an interest in this project and

the Foundation for World Education awarded a grant for it to begin as soon as possible.

It was important to find a core scheme that would enable us to support the existing class teachers in both delivering the programme and extending the four skills of language development, reading, writing, listening and speaking, into the English curriculum.

After much research and many different 'blind alleys' we found 'Fantastic Phonics' a World Literacy Project which has reached 500,000 children and adults in 90 different countries.

'Fantastic Phonics' works on three key levels:

- it teaches the fundamentals of phonic decoding.
- it teaches the 225 "Core Words" which comprise 50% – 70% of text.
- it teaches the 500 "Common Words" which are found in everyday vocabulary and text

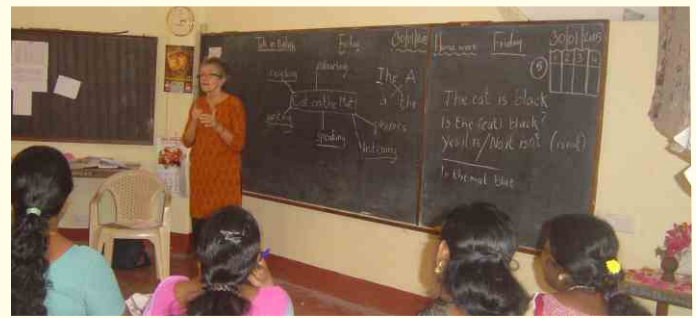
The programme is fully downloadable and comes in both coloured and black and white versions. We have opted for the black and white option which provides, in effect, colouring books as well. In this way the teachers can begin to use the reading books as a focus for the development of other language skills in the classroom. The affordability of this scheme means that each child can have his or her own book and can be regularly monitored.

A core reading scheme, such as Fantastic Phonics, is a two-pronged programme providing

- a solid reading scheme from Upper Kindergarten to 3rd grade which will ensure that when students enter the higher grades they will have a firm basis for further reading development
- a core system of vocabulary and grammar around which an ESL programme can be developed.

The teachers meet regularly to explore the principles of phonics teaching, ESL teaching techniques and the very detailed teachers' notes which accompany each of the 60 books.

Fortunately, Aikiyam School staff had already had a lot of phonics input so the concepts were not entirely new. However, 'Fantastic Phonics' has a particular step by step approach to phonic awareness which, once learnt, clearly supports the teacher in the delivery of the programme. The teachers have also made a commitment to improve their own English and simply by working with the scheme and exploring methods of teaching reading and ESL, are further developing their



Marion explaining Fantastic Phonics to teachers

language as well as their teaching skills.

We were going to begin the reading programme in July at the beginning of the academic year but such was the enthusiasm that we began running the scheme for a 'trial period' during the last six weeks of the past school year and it has just taken off!!

The next phase is to take a listening and speaking course into each class to run alongside the Fantastic Phonics books. It's a challenge but one I'm sure everyone will rise to!

Principal Shankar, who is also the Grade 3 English teacher says: "This programme is teacher-friendly because it's ready-made with step-by-step instructions but you can also go beyond. The material is actually in the hands of the children and it isn't time bound, allowing the teachers to pace the delivery."

Manju, Grade 1 Teachers says "The children like and understand the short stories and are interested to read the stories themselves. It's a different and more interesting way of teaching. It's joyful learning!"



Praveena, Upper Kindergarten Teacher says "The INSET workshops (weekly teacher training workshops) are very useful. The books are big and clear and easy to use for both the teachers and the children. The children enjoy the stories and are very happy to have their own books. The books have all the exercises that are needed such as reading, writing and colouring. The step by step Teacher's Notes are very clear and easy to use".



We are happy to announce that by the time you receive this newsletter we will have launched our new website [www.aikiyamschool.wix.com/bilingualschool](http://www.aikiyamschool.wix.com/bilingualschool) It is still quite minimal in terms of content, especially the pages on students, teachers and facilities, but we plan to remedy that in stages throughout the school year. A special thank you to volunteer Julie Cunningham for the layout and design.



You can send your donation via the Auroville International Centre in your country, or send a cheque made payable to 'Auroville Unity Fund', Town Hall, Auroville, 605101 Tamil Nadu, INDIA indicating clearly that the donation is for Aikiyam School, or you can send it electronically by going to [auroville.com/donations/](http://auroville.com/donations/) and following the instructions.