

Vanakkam Aikiyam Friends

Our teachers and students are very busy at this time of year, as you will see when you read this Newsletter. Also in January we had celebrations for Pongal and Republic Day, and we are rejoicing in the fact that we recently began the long awaited construction of some new classrooms. We hope our Newsletter conveys some of the spirit behind what is happening in Aikiyam today.

As always, we remain deeply grateful for your support. Aum... Shankar.



Construction Begins on New Classroom Building, Which Replaces the Old, Recently Demolished Building Shown as Insert



Republic Day - Waiting for the Flag to Unfurl



Land Art Flag

Vanita, a former student of New Creation Bilingual School, who went on to do degrees in Mathematics and Education, is now the Math teacher for our upper grades. She writes:

Hi, I am Vanita and I work as a Math teacher in Aikiyam School. I love Math and I love teaching it. I feel comfortable and confident when teaching and feel satisfaction as I do my job. Aikiyam is a wonderful place where one can feel free to express one's ideas and knowledge without obstacles.

Since some of the students find Math to be a difficult subject, I want to change that feeling. I try different methods and do many activities to get their interest. One of these is asking students to solve problems by themselves.

By doing this, I can understand in which way the subject interests them. Sometimes I throw questions at



Seventh Grade Math Class with Vanita

them without telling them which method to use, in order to get them to think on their own, and bring new ideas to solve the problem; then I teach the so-called

'right' method. In fact, in Math we don't have a right or wrong method. Whatever method is followed, it is to bring us to a comfort zone for solving a problem. So, all the methods are correct. Many times we teach Math using our own day-to-day life oriented examples and that helps students to connect Math in their lives. (In the photo of class outdoors, the students are measuring the gardens and the buildings so they can calculate perimeters and areas.)

I feel proud to work in Aikiyam as a team member where I am able to express my thoughts and ideas on the students' ideas. I thank Aikiyam to give this opportunity.



Measuring and Calculating Perimeters and Areas

Simone has been teaching English and theater to our younger children in kindergarten and elementary grades for the past two years. She comes to us from Transition School, where she taught dance, theater and French since the mid 1980's. Here is what she writes:

Play and Language Education

I use acting stories as a tool for language education. Stories, when told with the support of illustrations, are a wonderful way to captivate the attention of young students. They make it possible to communicate meaning through context in a direct, intuitive way, similar to the way language is acquired by children in their natural environment. They facilitate the introduction of new, simple vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.



Acting Stories as a Tool for language Education

As the story is being told, I ask the students to repeat the dialogs of the different characters in groups and individually, as well as to translate them in their own language to ensure that the meaning is well understood. Translation helps build a strong bridge between languages. It reinforces vocabulary

in the child's language that may be poorly developed. It stimulates a part of the brain, which may not have been used before in such a way, as it seems that learning by heart without necessarily understanding is the more traditional method. Fun is an important and indispensable ingredient in this exercise.

Acting the story out is the fun part. Volunteers take turns performing in front of the class. The class helps when memory fails, and in this playful way all of the students learn the entire play. Dialogs or parts of them



can be written on the board for support. There is a constant interaction between repeating and translating, between reading and saying, between group and individual.

For young children, I deliberately choose stories with repetitions. They help engrave language in the memory. *Gruffalo* is full of repetitions, is funny, and has captivated the attention of all students, allowing them to get familiar with simple expressions, and to gain confidence.

English becomes closer, more familiar, and accessible in a playful manner.

Theater offers children also the experience of the technical aspects of acting (e.g., stage direction, props, and costumes) and they usually develop a new self confidence in oral expression. In the context of our school where English is a second language, repeated exposure to well articulated language is beneficial particularly for those who have difficulties in expressing themselves in English. An improvement in their writing skills often follows a performance.

Theater is a way for children to understand that work and cooperation are measures of success.

The joy that follows the performance, the feeling of success and achievement give the students a wonderful reward for the efforts made.



Gruffalo is Full of Repetitions, Helping to Engrave Language in the Memory

Jean Eisele is a faculty member in the Education Department at the University of Washington at Bothell in the USA. She has been coming to Auroville for several years with one or two students from the Department of Education, and contributes to the professional development of our teachers by leading workshops. She also directs the Story Project where students from Aikiyam co-write a story with students in an American school. (We wrote about one of these stories in our June 2014 newsletter.) She writes:

In December, I once again had the distinct pleasure of spending time with teachers and kids at Aikiyam School. My time was all too short, but I always love watching the kindergarten teachers at work with those adorable little ones, and I was impressed once again with the visible learning there.

Shankar had asked for ideas for helping older students to gain fluency in their writing of English, and we hatched a plan from one of them that gleaned some good progress. First, students told traditional stories orally in Tamil, (building on work from last year,

when they collected traditional stories from their grandparents). They then wrote those out, again in Tamil where their language is fluid. Finally, they translated those versions word-for-word into English, and we found that this sequence resulted in a greater flow in their final drafts.

I was delighted to help fourth grade teacher Selvaraj, his German volunteer assistant Kaya, and their students publish and celebrate their latest International Partner Story, a co-authoring project between countries that teaches cultural elements through the medium of story. They had written the first half of a wonderful story entitled "Party in the Mosquito Pitch," which was completed by students of Concord Elementary School in Seattle. Each class creatively used photographs rather than drawings to illustrate their story, acting it out and allowing their story partners to visualize more of their daily lives. As always, each author was given a copy of the completed book, and a copy was put in the library.



Photographs from "Party in the Mosquito Pitch"



Jean Eisele visits Kindergarten



Teachers Selvaraj and Kaya with Fourth Grade Students

Computer Classes

Students from the 4th to 8th grades have at least 3 hours of computer classes per week, and even more if they choose computer as an optional class. We recently talked to computer teacher, **Vadivelu** about his work.

He says that when was young, he had no computer but he really wanted to learn. A second-hand computer was given to his older brother, and he was able to use it. He started reading computer manuals and learned everything he knows by himself from studying them; including graphic design, trouble shooting and networking. So, today, he is particularly happy to pass on his knowledge.

Vadivelu teaches by showing the students a sample of something that the students might want to do; for example, a postcard-size invitation with a story inside. He then asks them, "Do you think we can do something like this?" All the students go to the internet and find images and software they can download to do the project. Sometimes, he asks them to bring an example

of what they would like to do in class. "My Dad did this; how did he do it?"

Vadivelu says, "They teach me through their questions. For example they say to me, 'I will have cashew fields to take care of when I graduate, so why do I need to use a computer?' Then, I let them learn that they can get information from the internet about fertilizers and natural insecticides, crop yield, or packaging and processing. They see that the computer is a tool."

Vadivelu writes, "Students also learn by watching videos, responding to questions and completing on-line quizzes. They attempt challenging assignments and step toward mastering significant technological skills, all while exercising their knowledge of English." He says, "If the students' English is not strong, they cannot read the information on the net. As their English improves, by 8th standard we will be able to develop more technical skills such as using Photoshop or other software."



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