

Vanakkam Aikiyam Friends,

Aikiyam is very glad to meet you via its newsletter at this time of the year. As you can see in the newsletter, our teachers are getting deeper into their classroom activities. This is a festive term when children express what they learn through classroom presentations, new Awareness Through the Body activities, and celebrations like Pongal, which connect them with their cultural roots.

Parents send us good comments about our work and take time off from their jobs to visit the classroom and see their children's work. We happily share what we do with children and teachers from other schools in the area. Yes, we grow by sharing with others. Needless to say, we feel you are all involved through your support. We hope you enjoy reading about the current events of Aikiyam in this newsletter and write back to us with your impressions.

Aum... **Shankar, Principal**



Shankar Introducing the Project on Insects



Pongal Celebrations

This year during morning assembly time, Aikiyam School concentrated on one of the human virtues. Recently we talked about how people express the feeling of "gratitude". Pongal is one of the

important festivals of the Tamilian people, a yearly event that is connected with gratefulness and thanksgiving. Pongal (Harvest Festival) is celebrated each year on the day the sun moves



Beautiful Kolam



Deepam Children Enjoying Pongal with Us



Stirring Pongal Rice



Bullock Cart Ride

from Capricorn to Aquarius. On Friday, January 10th we celebrated Pongal in the school. We were all together, students, teachers, volunteers, all our staff members and guests. The students from Deepam were invited to join us. Everyone had such an enjoyable time! We cooked Pongal rice, did a puja and thanked all our tools, teachers, gardeners, the farmers growing our food, and the

animals all around us, especially the cows. Our ladies drew big and beautiful *kolams* (doorway drawings) on the ground with colored flour. We had lots of candy and games. All of us were dressed up in our party best, no uniforms today! Children and adults enjoyed the bullock cart ride!

This was truly an effervescent moment!

Awareness Through the Body by Teachers, Sathyavani, Aruna and Usha



Learning Control and Co-ordination Through Breath Exercise

Awareness Through the Body (ATB) is a comprehensive curriculum of exercises that aims to raise awareness and enable children to become conscious of their own perceptions and abilities. These activities are creative and fun! ATB improves the children's attention span, concentration and self-confidence, allowing them to explore themselves more freely.

An activity that the children all love is "Parachute." We use a very big, striped and checkered cloth sheet. We all imagine that it is, for example, a magic bus that can take us wherever we want to go together. So, if we "go" to the beach, the children make waves with the sheet, big waves, small waves.

Another activity is "Animal Walks." We put "magic powder" onto the children's heads to transform them into an animal such as a snake, frog, rabbit, elephant, horse, or other. Each child moves as that animal does and this is very much enjoyed.

We also do an activity called "Run with Music." Using musical instruments or the tape recorder, our crèche and upper kindergarten classes move with the music. The children are told to follow the rhythm; fast, medium, slow and when the music stops they must stand like a statue.

We do "Brain Gym" exercises such as cross crawling and the energy yawn.

At the end of every class we do a relaxation for 7-10 minutes, lying down on the floor and feeling some object on the body. The texture and weight of these objects varies; wood blocks, bean bags, cloth, drops of water, etc.

This year our new program for Aikiyam students includes weekly classes for creche and lower kindergarten (LKG). With Sathyavani as a teacher for both the Supportive Learning program, and ATB, we are continuing the Supportive Learning programs for 13 children from LKG to 3rd grade using ATB methods and working with them individually and in very small groups. Depending on their needs, we work with different angles as needed, such as muscle toning for physical strength, rhythm exercises for the distracted or hyper-active, and even speech development with mouth articulations.

Over the last 5 years many children have benefitted from our curriculum. The ATB team now offers its activities to all Aikiyam students up to the 4th grade at which level the classroom teachers take over the continuation of the exercises. The class teachers give us feedback that the children are showing improvement.



Working on Core Muscle Strength Using Belly Skateboard

Project Report on Insects (Creche - LKG) by Teachers Usha, Vijaya, Kalaiselvi and Volunteer, Anglina

We started the project "Insects" in November 2013 with crèche and LKG and brought it to an end in December 2013.

We started the project by asking the children: "What are insects? Where do they live? What do they eat?", and many more questions. They were taught about how insects move; for example: some insects fly, some walk, crawl, etc. We discussed and explored the advantages and disadvantages of insects. The children

were also taught not to harm insects.

Resources

We collected many books from the library according to the children's level. We learned through games, songs, watching a film called "Beep Life", flash cards, and reading stories. We were shown new insects everyday. We also grew a spider inside our block and everyday we learned about its lifecycle.



Happy Faces

Art

Children made worms using different shapes. They used many types of waste materials to make craft works. Children showed their creative skills through drawing, colouring, painting, clay models, printing and made a home of the insects e.g. webs using woolen thread and sticks. Also they did cutting and pasting, tearing, collage making. Children made books about the butterfly's life cycle.

Outing

Children were taken to the Botanical Garden, Discipline Farm and the school garden to show them different types of insects. Children learned that different insects choose to live in different plants according to their food habits. They were shown insects that eat only leaves and vegetables. They were shown the worms. They were also told about the importance of insects in the garden "Without insects there would be no plant life", this was the lesson.

Learning Outcome

Through this project children were able to learn so many skills like reading, writing, arts and crafts, jokes,

questions and answers, speaking in English and Tamil correctly, activities like names of the shapes, counting the shapes, colours, adjectives like big and small, tall and short and many more. The children were also able to teach their parents about keeping the surroundings clean. This was shared with the parents. Children learned to love and care for the insects. Children presented without fear on the stage. This project was useful and enjoyable for both students and teachers.



Making Spiders' Webs

My volunteer experience at Aikiyam School, by Australian Volunteer, Julie Cunningham

I loved Aikiyam School from the drive in! Turning off from the road from Kulapalayam village towards Auroville, you pass old trees and banyans that shade cows resting, goats and the local motorbike rental shop. From the gates of the community of "New Creation", the school is first on your left before the road winds into this community featuring the distinctive modern architecture of Auroville. In the school too, the architecture is distinct. Many classrooms are reminiscent of settled space saucers and in size and design, they express something of the nature of the school's culture; creative, unusual, playful, fully child-centered. Being a part of this interesting and fun educational community where much effort is spent on making the children's learning experience creative, particularly in the early years, has been a delight. Volunteers are made very welcome and many of the teachers, children and volunteers eat together every school day with the children in the communal dining hall where lunch is on offer. Shankar, the head of the

school, went out of his relaxed, but fully-engaged, multi-tasking way to show me around and to share his knowledge and ideas about Tamil culture and Auroville, and about creating a bridge between these two in the school and elsewhere.

My engagement with the school was initially through art therapy. I was working with teacher, Tia Pleiman in her integral art studio where children from the crèche



Julie at Integral Art Class

upwards to about 14 come to engage in many and varied creative art processes. Tia is an art therapist from New York, who realized her aims and practice to be very in alignment with the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the guiding forces of Auroville. Tia has been forging a dynamic practice in the school. It was so interesting to work with her and also to replace her for about three weeks when she went to Orissa to work with tribal children in a Sri Aurobindo Ashram school there. Many adjectives apply to the experience of working with Tia - inspiring, fun, informative, stimulating and rewarding, personally and professionally.

The children are very delightful and also challenging of course! When any creative process is articulated well, they respond with enthusiasm and as they come from many impoverished families, they appreciate being able to work with art materials and particularly in the fun way Tia facilitates. Many of the class groups will come with their teachers so Tamil/English language issues are alleviated.



Through the art processes the children not only have fun, but nourish their spirits through creativity and meditation, reflection and storytelling and also expand their literacy and social skills such as collaboration and patience. For the younger grades, motor skills are also developed through various art activities

I was also sharing an apartment with Tia and so there was ample time to discuss and reflect and cook up new processes. The Aikiyam Teachers' Residence where she and other teachers live was also a delight. One of the teachers organized a bonfire to celebrate Christmas, asking village children, who attend the local Cultural Center, to come. It was a sweet Christmas event.

It was a joy to be there, engaged with art therapy, and then later, as I saw it would help the school, I built a new website which features videos of Shankar, Tia and other activities of the school.

Appeal for Funds

We remain very grateful to all of you for your continuing support, even in these difficult financial times. The school would not be able to run without it.

The school receives almost half of its running expenses from Auroville, mostly in the form of salaries and maintenances for some of our teachers, and a regular budget of Rs. 50,000/- per month to cover a part of our nutrition program and part of our running costs. In addition we receive about Rs. 200,000/- per year from the Indian Government for repairs and painting, which takes place in the summer holidays.

The rest of our budget depends on donations. With inflation and having to assume financial responsibility for our computer and sports programs, which were previously provided outside of the school budget, we need donations of around Rs. 2,300,000/- per year or up to Rs. 1,025/- (€12 or \$16.5) per student per month to cover regular running expenses. We appeal to each one of you to either make a donation if you can, even if it is only a few rupees, and/or to tell your friends about us. Your gifts are always received with great joy and appreciation.



Lunch in School Dining Room

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/ and following the instructions.