

### Transformative Experience

Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry conducts training sessions for teachers every year. Teachers from our school got the golden opportunity to be a part of this workshop on Integral Education from 16<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018. Participants in attendance at the workshop included teachers, school principals, administrators and trustees from different schools across India who wanted to take forward the mission of education as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The workshop was divided into a number of sessions comprising study, discussions and activities providing the participants a wide exposure on the different aspects of Integral Education and demonstrated how learning could indeed be made joyful and creative. The sessions were aimed at helping teachers develop an experiential understanding of the Integral Education approach which posits creating an appropriate environment as a prerequisite to facilitate learning in children.

On the first day, participants were introduced to the three principles of education given by Sri Aurobindo and the philosophy behind the practice of observing silence at the start and end of every session. The second day had instructors guiding the gathering on strategies to train the mind to realize its full potential. On the third day, through physical activity and games, participants were made aware of the power of the sensory organs. A session on the importance of learning Sanskrit and reconnecting with the mother language was scheduled on the fourth day. An enjoyable visit to a farm to experience the wealth of nature and to stimulate the creative potential of the participants was the agenda of the fifth day. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed this outing and expressed this liberating experience creatively in the form of poems, stories and art and craft.

On the sixth day, a video on the spiritual awakening of the Mother and her vision was shown to the gathering followed by a session on the power of language. The last day saw participants indulging in some fun games to improve faculties such as concentration, attention and patience.

At the end of the workshop, participants could wholeheartedly appreciate the spirit of integral education that at once ensures participation, growth and enjoyment for children while also enriching the teachers. The workshop was one of the concrete steps taken towards turning all of our education into a child-centered process.



## Changing dynamics of being a teacher

Students spend a great deal of their time with teachers and therefore a teacher plays a vital role in the life of a student. Keeping this in mind, Harvinder didi conducted a session on 'The role of a teacher' for diyas at AMIS on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018. She emphasized the duties of a teacher go beyond imparting information and facts to encouraging learning by creating a happy and fear free environment for children. She upheld the image of a teacher who grows with a new challenge every day, is aware of his/her shortcomings and shows a willingness to improve herself/himself. Besides, the teacher is also responsible for empowering the student to emerge as a competent youth, ready to take on the challenges of a rapidly changing world and at times initiating change for a better world. Hence, it is important that teachers continuously upgrade their knowledge and methodology in order to enhance the quality of teaching.

Clearly, the role of a teacher is more than just planning and executing lesson plans. Teachers at AMIS strive to be constant positive role models for their students and inspire them to perform to the best of their ability.

## The World of the Project



The Integral Project at AMIS provides a platform where learning goes beyond the confines of the classroom. The project caters to the interest and curiosity of the learner. Diyas attended a session on the project method conducted by Yamini didi on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018. She began with a few questions for the teachers to ponder over, after which there was a discussion on how the Integral Project goes beyond the classroom and integrates a variety of subjects. Teachers got a taste of the project as they were allowed to present one. Divided into three groups, each group picked a topic to work on. The project topics chosen were Chocolate, Mango and Aliens. Each group then actively brainstormed on the various aspects of the topic and presented the results of the brainstorming in the form of a mind map. The groups estimated the time it would take to complete the project and went about planning and gathering information. After a week the diyas were geared up to make their presentation. It was an enriching experience to see the innovative presentations made by the groups. Some presented the project in the form of a play, while others recited poems, sang songs and used PowerPoint slides to display information. The projects also touched upon the values associated with the topic. The mangoes and chocolates relished by teachers was an added bonus.



## To think beyond the box

A session on 'Critical thinking' conducted by Harvinder didi on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2018 was an interesting and thought-provoking experience for the participants. The session catered specially to social science and science teachers. On the very first day, Harvinder didi introduced teachers to what critical entailed and why children needed to develop critical thinking skills. She explained that critical thinking was the will to challenge a belief system. The mind examines for evidence that are against the belief system. A critical thinker asks questions, analyses different approaches and does not restrict himself/herself to one belief system. He/ She takes all the perspectives and weighs up evidence on every side. She pointed that children are naturally inquisitive and are always ready with questions. Hence, encouraging them to ask thought provoking questions would help them develop critical thinking skills and formulate their own opinions. After breaking down the importance of critical thinking, Harvinder didi assigned teachers the task of listing critical questions pertaining to their subject.

On the second day, teachers came armed with their questions and were eager to voice them as the session began. The questions were extremely unusual and turned out to be quite the brain teasers. However, not all questions qualified as critical nevertheless they inspired everyone to rack their brains for answers. Among those that qualified, an interesting question was "Why should we accept Greenwich time as the standard time for the whole world?" The question got everyone thinking and elicited interesting responses from the gathering. At the end of the session, teachers went back with questions crowding their mind that they had never thought of before. The questions broadened their understanding of the subjects and left them with a deep yearning to learn more and further probe established systems of knowledge.

## Understanding Learning and Children



On the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> May 2018, parents had come together brimming with eagerness that was laced with a tinge of nervousness to begin their journey with the school. They were asked to relax by closing their eyes and becoming sensitive to the sounds around them. The first day of the parent's workshop began with a welcome speech by Yamini didi who asked the gathering the importance of attending a workshop like this, which was to span the next five days. She informed that the workshop was curated with the aim to acquaint parents with the ideology underpinning the working of the school

in an effort to ensure smooth collaboration between parents and teachers.

This was followed by Harvinder didi enquiring those gathered for their reasons to attend the workshop. After receiving a variety of responses ranging from the serious to frivolous, she emphasized that the welfare of children was the primary concern that had propelled parents to the workshop. She assured parents that each child in the school was precious and would be nurtured carefully to make a difference in the world. Proceeding further, she asked them to think of a value that they would want their children to learn. Parents spoke of values like contentment, joy, calmness, independence, self-reliance and gratitude among others. She, then asked them to share their strategies to develop these values in their children. This was followed by a discussion on ways to inculcate the aforementioned values. Harvinder didi ended the session by asking parents to develop the value of contentment in children which is rather rare in the materialistic world of today.



From the second day of the workshop, Parents participated in 'Powers Within games' each morning. They were divided into groups and assigned a new 'Powers Within' game each day. Teachers guided the games and at the end of it explained the objective behind playing these games with children each morning as they came to school. 'Powers Within' games are specially designed for children with the aim of inculcating certain faculties in them. To get a taste of these interesting games parents were asked to play them. The games aimed at developing faculties such as concentration, focus, balance, teamwork and flexibility among others.

Post Powers Within, parents took turns to present a value-based assembly on the theme of cooperation. On the second day, the first team of parents narrated the story of "The Little Red Hen", producing all the animal sounds perfectly which drew loud applause from the audience and ended the assembly with a prayer. On the third day of the workshop, the assembly conducted by parents included a Sanskrit song and a skit based on the theme of "Cooperation". The fourth day had an interesting assembly where parents sang the song "We shall overcome" with each singer singing it at a different pitch leaving little room for coordination and smooth singing. This humorous situation demonstrated the importance of cooperation in accomplishing any work systematically and smoothly. The last day's assembly started with a skit portraying two families, one functioning smoothly as members in the family cooperated with each other and the other disorderly as they lacked cooperation and communication among them. This way the skit drove home the message of cooperation effectively. Everyone enjoyed and highly appreciated the assembly held on each day.

On the second day of the workshop Harvinder didi discussed the objective behind designing the school assembly on a specific value and made clear the correlation between values and 'Powers Within' games. She created an interactive forum to introspect on the question '**Where do Values come from?**' As parents listed various sources such as teachers, friends and family, Harvinder



didi asserted that values were dynamic and ever evolving. Later on, teachers at AMIS who were also parents shared their parenting experiences with the gathering. The session got more interesting when Harvinder didi assigned parents an exercise wherein they had to think of five values for their children to learn, they were then asked to cut down the list to two and at last zero in on one. Didi, then asked to know the criteria parents used to

prioritize that one value over others. Following an exhaustive discussion, she concluded that parents had to live the value they wanted their children to inculcate in themselves.



The session on the third day was on the principle “Nothing can be taught” conducted by Harvinder didi. This session proved to be quite a revelation as didi dispelled many myths and misconceptions surrounding learning and led parents into the realization that the onus of learning lies on the learner and not the teacher.

The fourth day began with a session on “Freedom and boundaries” led by Harvinder didi. It was a highly interactive session, which threw up some questions for

parents to ponder upon such as how freedom plays an important role in the holistic development of a child. Should freedom have some limitations and boundaries? How does one strike a balance between freedom and boundaries? Didi informed that the concept of boundary was imperative for understanding freedom in its true sense. Real freedom is not about having no limitations rather it is about finding liberation within.

A session on “Food and Nutrition” by Sheetal didi followed next. In this session, emphasis was laid on the contents of the ‘lunch box’ as an important source of nutrition for healthy growth and development of a child. Parents were encouraged to send simple but healthy homemade food in their child’s lunch box and refrain from junk food. Tips were given on how to make the lunchbox interesting for fussy eaters. Parents were also advised to send dry fruits or any seasonal fruit on birthdays and donate books to the library.

On the last day, Harvinder didi conducted a session on the need to ask questions and the power of questioning. She explained that questions formed the foundation of learning and inspired individuals to explore until they found answers. Then Yamini didi spoke about an interesting and novel way adopted by the school to facilitate self-learning in children, which was the ‘Project’ method. The workshop came to a close with Harvinder didi, Yamini didi and the coordinators answering questions that emerged from parents during the course of the workshop.





## Starting a New Journey

On 2nd June 2018, AMIS conducted its orientation day. The teachers along with the admin and support staff were form all introduced. Harvinder Didi briefed parents on the philosophy and functioning of the school. Yamini didi delineated the expectations of the school from parents and children. It was followed by sapling planting to mark the start of a new journey for children joining the school this year. Just as the saplings the children await their time in school to bloom into their full glory. The saplings planted by parents were medicinal and diyas enthusiastically explained their medicinal properties to parents who were very keen to learn.

Later during the second half of the day, orientation for parents of students moving from UKG to grade 1 was held. Although the day witnessed some heavy rains,



parents made it to the school and the venue was surprisingly full and teeming with parents and teachers. Teachers handling grade one introduced themselves in turn. Parents were made aware of the imminent adjustments and changes that awaits children as they make the transition from UKG to grade one.



## Spreading the joy of Ramzan

A country with diverse religions and cultures, festivals in India often diminish differences and bring people together in bonds of love and celebration.

We at AMIS strive to build harmony by respecting every religion and involving ourselves in its celebration.

We celebrated Id-Ul-Fitr on 15 June 2018. Students of grade V eloquently explained the message of Id-Ul-Fithr, through a short skit where a Muslim girl invites her Hindu friend home to soak in the spirit of festivity and enjoy the hospitality and kindness of the Muslim brethren in the country. It was followed by a Sufi dance and a mesmerizing song. Children from Pre-Primary to Grade VIII enjoyed the performances and went back to their respective classes relishing the dry fruits given as part of the celebration.

