

**Evaluating and documenting the implementation of
Integral Education in Auroville
Interim Report
(07/2016 till 06/2017)**

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1 **Introduction**

The philosophy of Integral Education is based on Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's comprehensive writings. The phrase "Integral Education" is used and defined by The Mother. One example: "An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilized" (CWM 12, 293). In addition: "Our aim is not a national system of education for India, but an Education for the world at large" (CWM 12, 249). This was in July 1965.

Already on Dec. 25th 1950 she wrote a series of articles 'On Education'. She stated: "In these articles I'm trying to put down into ordinary terms the whole yogic terminology.... (CMW 12, 1). The practical realization started in the Ashram School in Pondicherry, known as "Sri Aurobindo International Center on Education" (SAICE). The Registrar since November 1958, Kireet Joshi, later the chairman of the Auroville Foundation (1999 - 2004) implement a new methodology and SAICE developed it over the years: it was called a "Free Progress System" which was spearheaded by group of teachers. Amongst them was Tanmaya, a French teacher at the Ashram School. It was he who presented on Dec. 16th 1968, a well thought-out paper titled, "Auroville – Towards an Integral Education", (Auroville Archive (AV Archive)) that centered around "Free Progress". But it hasn't been realized; there was also Yvonne Artaud's, "Auroville Program of Education" - which were recommended by The Mother as: "This is an excellent program which

must be realized – with my blessings.” (Original at: AV Archive) But even this excellent program didn’t manifest.

As Kireet Joshi mentioned later in his video interview (March 15th 2013; transcription in "Blessed are Those", published by SAIER in 2014-15) with Christine Devin and Alain Bernard, “When I offered educational help for Auroville I realized Mother wanted a totally new experiment.” So it started on 15th Dec. 1970 with “Aspiration School” as described in Savitri's, “Auroville - The first six years from 1968-1974” and in Heidi Watts’ booklet, “Little by Little – the evolution of Schooling in Auroville 1966 – 1980,” with Shanti joining from Equals One in collaboration with Shraddhavan (note by Shraddhavan, 12.03.2014; at: AV Archive)

Almost 50 years have passed. How has Integral Education developed through the years and what are its results after half a century. This is the right time to ask these questions.

2 Objectives

The central questions of this research project are:

- What are the unique parameters of Integral Education which are distinct from other known educational systems?
- Is Integral Education in Auroville an educational system or just an underlying philosophy for individual progressive learning in a collective way – or both?
- Is there still a common understanding of the core elements of Integral Education according to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother? Are these elements known and implemented in practice?

Therefore this research project intends to reconstruct and systematize core elements of Integral Education out of the educational practice in schools and other learning environments in Auroville. The questions are generated after thorough studies of the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, as well as on a profound research at the SAICE in the early 1980s, and has been updated by the final findings of the Auroville Retreat conducted in Auroville on 12 and 13 March 2015.

Throughout the years education in Auroville was driven and initiated by needs, by demands of actual reality. But to answer the questions raised in the “ Objectives” it needs a detailed understanding about the underlying philosophy. The leading principles for Auroville are Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teachings, in general reflected in the ‘Auroville Charter’, ‘A Dream’ and ‘To be a true Aurovillian’. But about education, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have been very specific. “On Education” by The Mother (CWM, 12) include the key articles about her view of Integral Education based on the philosophy of Integral Yoga.

This detailed view is on one hand needed because only from there can we understand and judge our educational practice. On the other hand it helps us to refocus our educational philosophy in distinction to other educational concepts. A third argument for a theoretical summary is the frequent use of quotations like, “Nothing can be taught” or terms like “Free Progress System” which lose meaning without reflecting their genesis.

3 The Evolution of an Idea

3.1 The Human Dilemma and Auroville

Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1918:

"At present, mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny ... A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity ... Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage." (A 19, 1053).

In 1979 the Club of Rome described the cause for the 'human dilemma' as the "discrepancy between the growing complexity of all conditions and our capacity to effectively respond to them" (Botkin et al. 1979, 25). And where we are today?

We are at the end of the post-war era! The mantra of the trinity:

- Free Society
- Global Economy
- Open Borders

doesn't work anymore. The liberal vision of the 20th century has come to an end. And the people feel it throughout the world because the indications are too obvious.

- the refugee crisis
- religious fundamentalism
- global terrorism
- financial crisis
- eastwards shifting geopolitics
- adverse climate changes
- technological miracles

The state as sovereign has failed. Democracies are in recession, authoritarian tendencies are progressing. Politics is not any more in a position to offer a coherent and meaningful vision for society. Essential decisions, with a significant impact on individual life, are being taken outside politics by huge corporations such as Google, Facebook and so many others. Our capacity to effectively respond to them is reaching a limit. And this is just the beginning. The world has run out of ideas, out of progressive visions for its future, has lost sight. Man at the crossroad. But what could be an alternative?

Are we getting closer to the 'concealed destiny'? Will we become 'Homo Deus' in the next step of evolution as Yuval Noah Harari maps out our future (Homo Deus, A brief history of tomorrow, Harper, 2017).

Or has Auroville a glimpse of an answer to it? It is the place the earth needs, the bridge between the past and the future as it is declared in its Charter - and a reality for almost 50 years. It's time to check the facts!

3.2 Education for a New Consciousness

Sri Aurobindo's answer to this question of the future of mankind, the human dilemma, is known since he has published his inner journey in a very systematic and comprehensive way. The Evolution of Consciousness as core parameter of his **philosophical anthropology**, the evolution of man. This answer to the question, "**What is Man**" needs a reflection as **pedagogical anthropology** meaning, "**How one becomes Man**".

One aspect of the answer: Integral Education.

All educational concepts worldwide have to address two key factors: the individualization of man and its socialization into the society to maintain its future ... according to its value system.

Therefore, in the timeline of history as well as in distinction of political

systems, formal education looks different worldwide. A close and controlled political system will need and provide an educational frame that transforms their “working material” into obedient followers. Democratic societies would like to educate conscious citizens, and indicates values based on “freedom”. Religious systems promote staunch believers.

But a vision, a dream of a society which is based on an evolving consciousness, progressive and focused on transformation of man through the inner, his psychic being will need educational guidelines for the art of being, the way of living in and for a future to come. In other words an ‘Integral Education’ has to offer an educational environment to grow, to evolve into the ‘Dream’, to live the society of tomorrow now.

This kind of education took shape formally with the beginning of the publication of The Mother’s articles ‘On Education’ (CWM, 12) in December 1950 and has been practiced in the Ashram (and many other schools in India, particularly in Odisha) as well as in Auroville – each offering a different environment. Therefore it is of importance for this documentation to understand the process and to reflect upon the impact in the different ground realities during the time: the Ashram environment (analysed, documented and published by JA, at: AV Archive) and the Auroville environment. So the focus here is Auroville. How has Integral Education been understood and realized in Auroville, or better, how has it manifested itself in the last 50 years as a process, and a structure, as well as its individual and collective results.

So the key challenges are the same in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy:

Since the historical man in evolution is centered in his ego-consciousness and identifies his mental faculty solely with his so-called waking consciousness, he remains alien to himself, separated

from large areas of his true being. The method to make man aware of these ranges of consciousness - **as being** - and to render them active at the outer surface is Integral Yoga. The method to guide and stimulate this process - **of becoming** - is called Integral Education.

Integral Education is therefore the tool and the process towards **self-revealing** (spiritual) and **self-expression** (social) of the individual as pre-condition for a collective progress. At the center of self-revealing we have to reflect the inner, the psychic being. In the area of self-expressing we have to focus on the progress of the instrumental level of education – the mental, vital and physical. But these are two sides of the same coin; they are interdependent. Therefore a teacher stimulates, supports, encourages and guides the child in unfolding all faculties concealed within him. But it is a permanent balance between the polarities ‘teaching as revealing’ and ‘becoming as unfolding’. This is the dividing line between a free and untampered becoming and the ‘intent to teach’ and a healthy balance must continuously be sought afresh.

It’s like in the allegory about a rope laid across the abyss which the guilty (man) has to walk across from life to death and from death to life. After he succeeded someone ask him: How did you master it? ‘I know nothing but this: when I found myself being pulled to one side, I leant towards the other.’

How does Integral Education mirror this dynamic?

3.3 Core features of 'Integral Education'

3.3.1 What is integral in 'Integral Education'?

Education frames the relationship we have with ourselves, other people, how we perceive reality, our value system – literally everything. So education as such is not bound on schooling or a particular system, but it is always linked to the current knowledge and the understanding of the world. Therefore educational systems reflect worldwide either more traditional, or modern or postmodern or even integral worldviews. In this line of reflection one can read more frequently the term of 'Integral' or 'Holistic' education. Since this terminology has almost become fashionable and therefore imprecise, here we are going to specify the term 'Integral' in our educational concept – to know what is the core of it.

The specific task before Integral Education lies in bridging the span between the two poles of human existence, Purusha and Prakriti - soul, conscious being and nature, evolved Existence.

On one hand Sri Aurobindo sees in man an imperfect, under-developed being, born in an imperfect world of a "lower, undivine... nature" (A 21, 671). But on the other hand he sees the 'individual soul', developing in evolution, "a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit" (A 17, 199).

But what is then the specific goal of Integral Education?

The specific goal is to guide man, the students to help them to arouse their soul as a spark of the divine but at the same time guide them to perfect their instruments so that his psychic being can grow and expresses itself through the developed and refined tools. Difficult? "Our aim is perfection" (M 12, 120), "but we do not seek perfection in

one thing, our aim is an integral achievement" (M 12, 119).

The term 'integral' therefore relates to the extensive character of education, taking into consideration man as a whole, that is to say, the so-called external instruments as well as the inmost sphere: the psychic being. Further, this psychic being is also the integrating factor which combines and integrates all the conscious forces of the other planes. Moreover, if one sees in the psychic being the evolved and evolving 'spark of the Divine', that is, one aspect of man which emanates directly from the 'One' and is therefore in this aspect not subject to any kind of change, then we clearly have a third integral aspect before us. It is that portion of the Divine consciousness, which is there in the individual as well as in all living beings ("...what seems inert suddenly becomes full of life ...everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time and limit..." (M 12, 33). So therefore all life becomes integral.

We talk of Integral Education therefore in a threefold sense:

- 1) Integral in terms of a comprehensive all-around education, self-revealing and self-expressing;
- 2) Integral in the sense that we have an all-encompassing and uniting factor in the psychic being;
- 3) Integral in its understanding that the the psychic being as 'spark of the divine' is One with all living beings in its essence.

Integral Education therefore is a comprehensive concept to unfold, develop and perfect all the faculties and aptitudes latent in the individual under the dominance of the psychic being. So far the theory.

But how to go about it when there are neither in the field of Integral Yoga nor in the field of Integral Education defined patterns or tools?

3.3.2 The ,Psychic Being' and its education

If there is something unique in our concept of 'Integral Education' it's the 'Psychic Education', which forms the very core and essence of this education, focusing on the psychic being.

It is in 1926 that Sri Aurobindo adopted the word 'Psychic Being', as proposed by The Mother, to give a name to that 'sheath of the soul' (Alain Grandcolas, "The Experience of the Psychic Being and its Mutation", p.27, at: AV Archive). He (A.G.) draws an analogy with a muscle which grows with practice: the psychic being grows whenever its envelop/sheath, the human being, follows a higher psychic movement or an indication from the psychic (ibid).

This concept of 'Psychic Being' which is formed by the Soul in its individual evolution is a unique idea which never has been described before - neither in the Christian nor in the Buddhist tradition nor in any other spiritual concept, except in the Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky. Sri Aurobindo speaks about a Divine soul that evolves!!!! and grows through successive incarnations. But Madame Blavatsky doesn't reflect the concept of the evolving psychic being just as the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner doesn't. The Mother said in 1958, "...we call 'being' an organised entity, fully conscious of itself independent and having the power of asserting itself and ruling the rest of nature..." (CMW 9, 339). This is the key to the basic understanding of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and the focus point of The Mothers Integral Education and with it distinct from other educational philosophies too. Since the psychic being is the nucleus of man, it is therefore the central issue of the educational concept. But which method could promote, stimulate this transformation from ignorance to knowledge?

In the publication 'Research on Education at the Sri Aurobindo

Ashram' (1968, p.72 ff, at: AV Archive) Kireet Joshi gives few indications and ideas which could govern psychic education - and which are known to the educational community.

But as far as the holder of this project (JA) is concerned, there is no specific process in actively 'revealing' the psychic being. There might be helpful environments, aspects of beauty as expression of perfection and harmony, values and attitudes but in the center there must be aspiration, desire and sadhana. Therefore there are no curricula for psychic education with four, six or whatever number hours per week. To make it clear:

“The psychic being emerges slowly in most men, even after taking Sadhana. One has to wait till the necessary process has gone far enough before it can burst its agelong veil and come in front to control the nature” (A 24,1098). Or, as The Mother said, “It’s only with sadhana and a very persistent effort that one succeeds in having a conscious contact with his psychic being. .. Usually it is considered that if one can do it in thirty years one is very lucky - 30 years of sustained efforts, I say” (CWM 7, 273).

3.3.3 Three Pedagogical Principles, in principle

In a commemorative article written as far back as 1894, on the occasion of the death of the poet Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Sri Aurobindo for the first time expresses his views on education in print, wherein he observes that "nothing which **is worth knowing** can be taught. Not what a man learns, but what he observes for himself in life and literature is the formative agency in his existence..." (A 3, 77; highlighting by the author).

The possibilities for making these discoveries and their quality is to a large extent determined by the individual's social milieu, so much so

that "the power of the environment is immense" (A 3, 82), as Sri Aurobindo was to himself conclude in this commemorative article.

More than fifteen years later, in 1910, these basic pedagogical reflections found expression in the three principles of education (A 17, 204f) which Sri Aurobindo has formulated in the first section to 'A System of National Education'.

- 1) nothing can be taught
- 2) the mind must be consulted in its own growth
- 3) one should work one's way from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be

Particularly the **1st principle** is frequently quoted in educational circles but not always in a comprehensive way. 'Nothing can be taught' means 'Nothing which **is worth knowing** can be taught!' Teaching in this sense means a revealing of involved potentialities. But if it comes to 'instructions' in particular, topics like sciences or any other topic which is scaled by time and content it can and should be offered by modern methodologies and didactics to assist the students. It makes a qualitative difference if the instructors are trained and experienced in their subjects and educated in specific methods.

But based on the understanding that all 'teaching is a revealing' and all 'becoming an unfolding' this dividing line between a free and untampered becoming and the 'intent to teach' must continuously be sought afresh. And The Mother logically concludes: "In practice, each one must find and apply his own method that which he understands and feels. It is only in this way that education can be effective." (M12,172). This expresses **the 2nd principle** that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth.

The **3rd principle of education** 'to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be' (A 17, 204f) seems to be obvious, but it doesn't mean only the 'mental' or 'physical' approach. It's the direct environment in the most comprehensive sense which is 'no less powerfully' involved in the molding of the individual.

"To tell the truth, we rely mainly on the all-surrounding atmosphere charged with spiritual force, which has an effect even if it is not perceived or felt" (M 12, 175).

3.3.4 Free Progress System - for whom?

During a conversation with The Mother towards the end of 1953, one of the students was to remark that he could see no difference between the system of education in the Ashram and that practiced elsewhere. To which The Mother replied: "Yes, my child. And for years I have been fighting for it to be otherwise... Essentially, for the time being, it is much more a school of professors than a school of students" (CWM 5, 416).

Even if 'Free Progress' is not a core feature of the Integral Education, it doesn't mean it's not an element of the educational philosophy; it was the most profound attempt of a methodology to manifest The Mother's teaching. 'Free Progress' is almost a synonym for the true Integral Education. It facilitates the intention of a new education for a New Consciousness, a practical frame to the unknown which for the student means:

- Retaining his autonomy in education and of discovering his own lines of

development

- Determining the direction and pace of progress on his own
- Developing courage and a sense of personal responsibility for every new step

The system has been called 'Free' "because it is not pre-structured; it is free because it is not imposed on every individual; free because it encourages one and all to transcend the limits of the past and open up to the search for new options for the Future; it is free because it is not steered from outside but by the individual himself, but by the inner self, the soul" (Tanmaya/Joshi, Free Progress System-its Necessity and Meaning, in: Mother India, 1968, 10/11, p. 88ff).

In one of many conversation with Tanmaya as my mentor he told me ... ' you study just about anything, whether it's a flower or a galaxy is irrelevant, the Divine manifest in everything; it makes no difference what you occupy yourself with. What we seek to achieve is to arouse the soul of the child. So take up anything that you come across – that's all I have to say!!!!' It's a progress guided by the soul and not! subjected to habits, conventions and preconceived ideas as The Mother said.

So 'free' for all?

The age group to join the Free Progress System were the 13 to 14 year olds. It was stated that it 'ought to be a privilege to be admitted to these 'Free Progress Classes' (M 12, 173). The Mother added, 'I said we should give freedom of choice to exceptional children because for them it is absolutely indispensable if we truly want to help them to develop fully....' (The Mother; in: Tanmaya, ibid. p. 128).

4 The realization of Integral Education

As I try to understand the philosophy and practice of Integral Education in more detail I see more clearly the magnitude of the task in a primarily unstructured landscape. Everything is an attempt, a dynamic process to reach the truth but the moment it gets a form it might become a structural handicap for progress (“When we have passed beyond individualising, then we shall be real Persons. Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar.”, A 16, 377) This mirrors exactly the dialectical process of the inner and outer development, between the evolving psychic and the formative instruments, between soul and matter.

How to manifest it, when vastness and openness are the constitutional elements of this education? The Mother’s answer: “It depends on the teacher. I don’t have a theory one could put down on paper” (M 12, 374). In this sense Integral Education is a kind of tightrope act where students and teachers are the artists on the same rope. But even the whole educational system is like a walk of the tightrope which fluctuates between Self-revealing and Self-expressing, between ‘Free Progress’ or ‘Certificates’. But these polarities are everywhere in Auroville - between Auroville as a City or Eco Village, between more privatisation or a more collective approach, between realists and fundamentalist. This dialectic is inbuilt in our mental being and will find a real solution only at a different level of consciousness. But what is going to happen till then?

In the first of the ‘Aspiration Talks’ on March 10th 1970 there is a dialog between some Aurovilians and The Mother about ‘trouble’. It goes like this: **M**: What is the trouble? **A**: The trouble is each one pulls in his own direction. No one is really in contact with what is true. **M**: We have

to bear in mind that we are starting from the present humanity. So you must face all the difficulties. You must find a solution. **A:** ...you know, several solutions are open to us. **M:** Each one of us has his own solution, and that is the great difficulty. To be in the Truth, each one has his own solution. **And yet we must find a way for all these solutions to work together.** (silence) (History of Auroville (HoA), Gilles Guigan (ed), Vol. 3, Book 8, page 3; highlighting by the author).

4.1 Education in the Ashram

The structured realization of this education started with the Inauguration of the **Sri Aurobindo International University Centre** on 6th January 1952, since 1st January 1959 known as **Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education (SAICE)**.

The author has done a qualitative research about Integral Education at SAICE in Pondicherry in the years 1980/1981. Based on participating observations, the author studied Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy with Arindam Basu and at 'Knowledge', taught students there in German language, made interviews with teachers, with students and was guided by his mentors Tanmaya (at school in charge of Free Progress System) and Jugal (Knowledge, Higher Education) on behalf of the Registrar Paru Patel.

After 15 months of collecting and analyzing material, the results of the study came to the following findings:

Even some thirty years after the founding of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre (6th January 1952; renamed on 1st January 1959), the high expectations still remain unfulfilled. Even the teachers, as the central pillars of Integral Education, had been unable

to attain the stature aspired of them. On the other hand, following the demise of The Mother, many teachers were found to be clutching desperately to her words and instructions, clutching on to them as if they were a dogma (JA, Integral Education, p.189). It was the rigidity, the conservativeness of the majority of the teachers which appeared to be the greatest obstacle on the path to new realizations. One seemed to have forgotten that what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother expounded was less of a rigid, static doctrine than a dynamic principle of life, the principle of permanent advancement, of inner and outer movement, of progressive perfection. Instead, one clung on to what had been handed down, and instead of acting out of inspiration, they waited uninspired – but in disguise of spiritual significance. A restrained take-off spirit had given way to a touch of habitualness and lethargy. This included the attempts of the ‘Free Progress Classes’ as well. ‘A system guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas’ (M 12, 172), and to be implemented according to the level of age. From the very beginning this methodology was very critically observed by the majority of the teachers, and was stigmatized as a system for the ‘exceptional one’.

Did this cast doubts on the entire concept of Integral Education? Not at all. For both the teachers as well as the school authorities were aware of the fact that the realization of the ultimate goal of Integral Education cannot be pre-programmed, but has to be nurtured on hope and faith, with the concrete process of execution always proving to be a difficult balancing act on a tightrope stretched across an unknown abyss.

And how it is today, another 50 years later in Auroville in a completely different environment but based on the same philosophy and aspiration? Here we are, 44 years after The Mother has sadly passed away, with only a few Aurovilians left in the field of education who had met The Mother.

4.2 Education in Auroville

4.2.1 Reflections on Methodology and the Process

As one can conclude from the design of this essay, it has a twofold motivation: on one hand it's the personal journey or yoga of the author to continue his journey, and on the other hand a need, a demand by the collective, articulated and formulated in the final paper of the Auroville Retreat 2015 in the field of Education: "We have to make a synthesis of what we are doing, what we have achieved and where we are at present and bring it to the world."

Reflecting these needs the author presented, together with the project co-holder Chali Grinnell, an educational research project to SAIER which was sanctioned in May 2015. Since it was designed as 'qualitative research' and based on the concept of participating observations, the author continues to study the relevant publications on Integral Education by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, started to teach at different schools (Future School and for a short time at Udavi School), visited relevant schools and kindergartens, and made consolidated interviews (Annex) with selected students, teachers and parents on their experiences in the field of education. In addition he participated in meetings focusing on educational 'issues': Auroville School Board, Dec. 12th; '7th conversation on Integral Education', Feb. 18th; 'Collaboration between Auroville and AVI in the field of further learning', Feb. 22nd and the Create Auroville Together (CAT) session 'What is education in Auroville', March 3rd; Auroville School Board on March 18th and was sitting in on classes in Nandanam and for a limited

time in The Learning Community (TLC).¹ Also, the findings of the 'Auroville Education Survey (1968-2013)' (AES), as well as the results of the survey by a student team in 2016/2017, are being reviewed for relevance to the author's observations.

- . The process of the findings and conclusions remains unique. Officially a Newcomer, but engaged with Auroville for 40 years, the author could recognize that his interview partners were slightly reserved in the first phase. It was not so much with the author as a person but more the issue. Unlike physical sciences which are clearly defined, education feels like a lifestream where everybody and everything is linked. In other words, nothing is hidden or can be hidden.. everybody seems to know something about it to a certain extent. Education is a marketplace for well-wishers. Therefore how well the interview went became a matter of trust, which takes time to establish. That I was able to reference SAILER and the project co-holder Chali helped a lot in the interviewing phase. It gave me more credibility.

To bridge this yet undefined space at the beginning, I prepared a questionnaire for teachers and students to give them, as well as myself, a chance to be prepared, and to give a structure to the interview in advance. For some of the teachers it was helpful. For the students actually it was not so relevant: nothing to hide, nothing to show! But the challenge was not only with the people to be interviewed, but with the interviewer too. Would I be able to reach the person, to connect in a way that trust could be built to make a genuine exchange possible? It didn't work with all the teachers, with the same kind of openness, but it did with almost all of the students.

¹ All the interviews are available to the public in an anonymous form as well as my findings in the Ashram School (Auroville Archive).

For me it was not only a journey through an unfamiliar place, it was a jump from discovering a place via Google maps on the computer screen at home, to exploring the surroundings by cycle over sandy roads in the heat: slow, observing and at the same time visible, being observed. At the end I could cross all the fences.

With this developing spirit and trust carrying me through the months (August 2016 till May 2017), it became clear that my journey was mostly a win-win-situation. Not only did I want to know and understand, my interview partners too wanted to explain and be understood - sometimes for the first time after years. The educational developments in Auroville had been at times very volatile with a collective impact that today can still be felt by some.

On the student side (former) I observed a conscious presentation of their educational journey in and outside of Auroville, that included critical observations. They were straight, courageous, and open. Aurovilians, some who went away and returned; some who never left. They express light, hope, and are keepers of the flame. Access to those former students was unlike the present generation which I couldn't really interview, since unforeseen dynamics in the various fields of education arose, and the current students themselves initiated interviews, with valuable results. Therefore my observations and conclusions for this report, with regard to 'actual student expectations,' are based on different meetings and presentations in which I participated, a brief personal talk with the 'Student Survey Group', and my understanding and analysis of the student survey results.

4.2.2 Observations

Since the material to analyze has different relevance in terms of both quality and quantity as a survey, we have categorized the fields of discussions and explorations in two themes: The individual perspective and the structural implication. With these observations it is then possible to highlight the findings and to formulate interim conclusions - correlating the objectives of the research with the observations. The need for possible adjustments are stated as recommendations.

4.2.2.1 Students' perceptions about their education

Looking at the interviews with former students presenting their educational experiences in Auroville, their arguments are quite in line with the finding of *Auroville Education Survey, 1968 - 2013: Summary*, in particular the two first observations:

- The respondents feel they have significantly benefited from their Auroville upbringing.
- The Auroville upbringing as a whole was considered an educational experience, reaching beyond schooling. Responses did not differ significantly according to the school students attended, or even if they completed their secondary schooling elsewhere.

But since the base of these observations are qualified interviews, different aspects have come up and have to be highlighted. Coming back after some years they have critical observations too:

- “AV is going a bit in the wrong direction in what is considered as development. Well, building and a little bit of small enterprises to make money like Europe 20 years ago is the wrong direction paying too much

attention of the material element and losing the real course for what it is meant” (Interview No. 1, Annex)

- “I am quite critical. And I had no apprehension when I came here, it was like, it's all going to be so great, because she is going to be in an Auroville school. And it's going to be really fun, and it's going to be really great. And, the reality is slightly different.” (Interview No. 7, Annex)
- “But I think what really pushed me are these reasons. And I wasn't content. I needed to achieve something, for me! Just to be able to say, 'Listen, I've done it.' Because believe it or not, when I left Auroville, I had the idea, 'I'm going for studies.' But then I was young, too sure of myself. Auroville does that to you, as a child. It gives you way too much confidence. Which is a good thing, but at times, it can be a bit, mellowed down.” (Interview No. 6, Annex)
- Q: “At school, or privately at home, was the philosophy or the spiritual aspect of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother’s teaching an issue or not?”

A: “No, it wasn't an issue, of course, we always heard: ‘Oh, we're in Auroville, we are doing this’. But I remember at that time, we didn't care so much, and we got annoyed, because everyone was always: ‘Yeah, we're special and we have to do this and we have to do that’ And we said, 'We don't want to have anything to do with it. We want to do what we want to do’. And then, only in Future School, much later, we actually started a class on philosophy. And before that I also did some in Last School, with Deepti, where we did readings of Sri Aurobindo, and analysis of it.”

Otherwise most of them have been more or less disturbed by the unstructured way of their educational upbringing at that time either due to bad ‘class organization’, limited qualifications of the teachers, or just not being provided the right option for them to go to the next educational level.

But there is nowhere a critical word about their teachers which are always considered as a part of their individual success story.

Similar findings have been revealed in the recent student-initiated survey 2016/2017, conducted by students with students from Transition School, TLC, Future School and Last School. Asked if they like going to school, almost 85% answered with a clear 'yes'. This positive note gets even more concrete if you see the answers of the question, '*What do you like about your school or what stands out?*' The answers below are a few individual samples, but in the context of other data, quite affirming:

- Importance of finding yourself
- The trust, the values of the school
- Teachers taking care, help to grow and to evolve
- Good approaches between teachers and students
- Allows us to do exams and creates possibilities to pursue further education

These quotations and conclusions are reflecting the reality throughout the different school environments. Individually there is a high level of satisfaction with the students.

4.2.2.2 Development of Auroville's educational landscape

As already indicated in the "Introduction" to this report, The Mother didn't give any clear indication about a transfer of educational experiences from the Ashram School to Auroville (see Kireet Joshi, video by Christine Devin and Alain Bernard). So the first (provisional) school, later called 'Aspiration School' was inaugurated on Dec. 15th 1970 at 5 pm by The Mother's son, Andre. The Mother's message: 'A sincere will to know and

to progress. Blessings' (HoA, Vol. 3, book 8, p.158; at AV Archive). On one side, tightly administered by Norman Dowsett (in-charge-of Aspiration School) on behalf of the Sri Aurobindo Society, there was this approach: "The Mother asked me to organise this school and I'm only concerned with what SHE wants" (ibid, p.157). While on the other, one could refer to the readings of the 'Pioneers' as described in the first newsletter called, 'Gazette Auroville': "...drawing inspirations from these words of The Mother: 'We are not interested in brilliant students but in brilliant souls.' The experience has resulted in a completely new departure from old traditional forms of education. The freedom at the School reflects implicit the surrounding environment of Auroville and the pioneering atmosphere of Aspiration in particular... The school has no curriculum, no fix classes, but areas of work which are students activated and not teacher dominated...the mental education is stimulated by **free progress** and self-discovery." (Gazette Auroville, No 3, May 1971 in: ibid. 159; highlighting by the author).

In this early years there have been Shanti from Equals One and Shraddhavan. Later they were assisted by former students from the Ashram School and Aurovilians. At first there were 5 full time teachers and of 44 potential students, only 35 children were admitted. With an understanding of the reflections and notes made by Shraddhavan and Norman Dowsett at the time, the practical dimension of the project was obvious. 'We began the first day with 44 students, but no book, no ball - We did, however, find some bricks and a wheelbarrow...' (Norman Dowsett, in HoA, Vol. 3, book 8, p. 158; ibid). There was an urgent need for education, no time for discussions about a comprehensive 'concept' as such and even the nominal term 'Integral Education' was not used explicitly anywhere. "So, I think the only area in which they could really maintain a pedagogical continuity was in the sports. They inaugurated sports for Aspiration School. At quite an early stage." (Shraddhavan,

Interview No. 13) .

And the methodology of 'Free Progress' made it through for good reason from the very beginning as our quotation from the Gazette has shown. As Shraddhavan sees it: "But I think there's an inner subtle thread of continuity all the way through." (Interview No. 13).

This practical approach, the response to needs, the implementation of new ideas as experiment, seems to be characteristic of the education in Auroville throughout the years, and continues until today. Action and aspiration and yet continuation, but driven by different motives: either by the idea or by reality, as we will see later. After this promising beginning, with the inauguration on 6th October 1971 of the first school built by design, 'Last School', all educational activity ceased around November 1976. The closure was due to known reasons; after the closure there were a lot of spontaneous initiatives to meet the educational needs, at least in a basic form.

But even after 1984/1985, when SAIER was created and established a modern educational infrastructure (Kindergarten; primary school: Transition; secondary school: Last School) over all the years there have been parallel developments and initiatives according to the needs of the parents or a group of teachers or as response to the reaction of the students in smaller or larger structures.

Since the Kindergarten and Transition School have been more 'structured' there has been an immanent invitation for an alternative, for the other side of the coin. The creation of 'Mirramukhi' in the beginning of the 1990s was a radical answer to that invitation. One of Mirramukhi's founder members, teaching in Transition, remembers at that time: "I said, but this is not that. This is not what The Mother is

telling. That is just, you take subjects and you put children in a classroom, and you do nicely because it is a nice environment. Ok. Maybe I try to start something.” (Interview No. 2, Annex). That was the beginning of an alternative to Kindergarten and Transition in a very radical way - by content, structure and method. Free progress was the chosen spirit, supported by Tanmaya and Kireet Joshi - but critically observed by the community. So it ended, de facto, in a fiasco, while the former students are still full of praise:

“I definitely enjoyed Mirramukhi. I didn't have any issues with it, but I think I must have been there when I was till seven or eight years. So, I don't remember any negative aspect as such....But the positive aspect was that there was a lot of focus on beauty in Mirramukhi. Everything was made beautiful, in terms of the environment. Everything was supposed to be beautiful. But the counter side to that, later, I guess, was that those things that were not beautiful were bad.’ (Interview No. 5, Annex).

Or another student: ‘I was happy, until a certain age. I think I was eight when the school started. Something like that. It went through different phases. The first phase was total Free Progress, which means total freedom. And obviously they found out it doesn't really work with small kids, so then it became a bit more structured. And, I liked it. I never asked to leave or anything like that. I liked it. As a teenager, I don't think it was the school that I was complaining about, but more the rigidity of my general education” (Interview No. 7, Annex).

‘Last School’, a focal point for higher education and from the beginning leaning towards ‘Free Progress’, couldn't or didn't want to answer the growing demand for a more structured, ‘exam-oriented’ education. This was the call for the creation of the ‘New School’(very briefly) and ‘Center for Further Learning’ (CLF) which was later renamed as Future School.

And what was the reason, the need of the community for TLC?

“There was never an intention to have a school, or how to do integral education, not about that methodology. We are in Auroville to do the yoga so to speak, each one understands it a different way. Sri Aurobindo's yoga is a journey of self discovery, understanding oneself better. We are a group of people who have children, and they occupy a huge part of our lives, for a certain period of our life, they are a bit the focus. So the intent was: 'This is what has been given to us, these children, and this is what we are here to do, there must be an overlap somewhere, let us try to go through this journey through the children.' It's not to provide anything for them, they are human beings, they will grow up into adults, they are also on this journey in Auroville, so the environment has to be conducive to this journey. That is the primary goal. This is where we are in our lives, how does it help us understand others better?” (Interview, No. 15, Annex).

What emerged then were different expressions, manifestations of an ‘unfulfilled need’ by the community or at least by a group of engaged members. In the paper, “The essence of education in Auroville,” it is stated this way: “Education is both demand and supply driven.” (by Chali a.o.; April 2nd 2015, at: SAIER). From the outside it looks like an ‘education by default’, however from the inside it could be understood as a conscious reaction by the community. Sometimes born out of necessities, sometimes created as an educational statement, or even perhaps it is a more subtle response as a balancing between the poles of ‘self- revealing’ (self-oriented Free Progress) or ‘self-expressing’ (social-oriented Structural Learning); these are in the true sense two sides of the same coin – the Psychic Being front and back, but in different approaches.

In principle there are as of today two lines of school education through all age levels: Kindergarten, Transition, Future School and New Era Secondary School along one line, and on the other Nandanam, Deepanam, TLC and Last School – at least in a formal sense. As Deepti qualifies it in her preface: “ Why this Auroville Education Survey” education separated into two streams providing on one side a program which offered the possibility of studying and passing for one or other of external school board exams available then; and on the other to an open-ended, creative ‘free progress’ approach. For the last 2 decades this seems to have become the settled shape of educationbut the argumentation on approaches continues. (in ‘Auroville Education Survey (1968-2013), p. 3)

And it goes on with structural, financial, and personal implications since it is obvious that not all ‘transitions’ and ‘initiatives’ are taken with mutual understanding or agreement.

4.2.2.3 Actual expectation by the students

After different periods of stewardship - at the very beginning the Sri Aurobindo Society, and in later periods by the teachers and parents alike - it works out for now that the students are getting their own say in their educational prospects.

Throughout the generations of students in Auroville a few points are evident for all: to remain flexible, diverse and oriented on the individual progress, and on the quality of the teachers.

In one survey a student said:

‘Keep it flexible. People want different things and Auroville could be the

one place that offers this choice.” (AES, 1968 – 2013, p. 28).

One of my interview partners stated:

Q: “Education, an idea what to do in future? It is nice that it hasn’t to be one thing or another...why not continuing experimenting... not bad changing all the time.” (Interview, No. 1, Annex).

In the latest survey by the students (2016/2017) the issues ‘flexibility’ and ‘changing’ are summarized under points like: satisfaction with ‘freedom’, ‘the feeling of community’ and suggestions like ‘collaboration between schools’ (March 2017).

Beside the fact that throughout the generations there are complaints about the quality and quantity of reliable teachers, the real concerns of the students in the year 2017 are:

- Some of the teachers
- Teaching methods
- Lack of accessible material resources available
- Lack of a variety of subjects, courses, internship
- Lack of a class on Auroville
- Lack of interaction between schools
- Extremities of schools
- The voice of students not taken enough into account
- Controversy concerning exams/tests
- Nutrition
- Lack of emphasis on Tamil

5 Findings

I remember my first discussion I had with an Aurovilian friend when I

came back to Auroville in 2015, after years of being away. Explaining to him my personal journey as part of the postwar generation in Europe I asked him, from his perspective as an Aurovilian, about accountability. He went out of his way and shared: “You know, we thought for quite some time, when the Matrimandir is finalized, latest by then the Supermental, the truth consciousness will manifest itself and the transformation will be feasible on the ground. But as we yet all know it takes it bit longer...but there are no regrets. I’m still happy to be a part of the journey, still happy to be a member of this crew with a ticket to somewhere.’ (Aurovilian, private talk)

Later then I felt home; I came back into a conscious reality. The adventure of consciousness has reached common sense. But is this really common sense?

With the same attitude we are trying to analyze 50 years of reflections, actions and corrections - a reality check, a kind of account in the field of school education. Where we are, where we are coming from, where we are going to go. But education is not a metrical science, it’s not a physical construction, it has no exact measures to be laid out, and therefore it seems sometimes to be a free for all. But it isn’t!!

Our findings are based on the methodology of participating observations, which means that observed conclusions are not ‘individual’, they are subjective. We are not reflecting the ‘objective truth’, if there is even something like this, but formulating subjective conclusions based on transparent and accessible data.

- Due to the practical development of education in Auroville, the concept and the theory of Integral Education was the name and the frame of educational action. It was, and continues to be, learning by doing. Therefore, as already generally in use, the term ‘Auroville Education’

seems to be more accurate. The concept is fragmented.

- 'Integral Education' in Auroville can't be understood as a system, but as a philosophical frame of reference for individual progressive learning in a collective way. (see objective 2b)
- The diversity of the different educational projects is reflecting Auroville's reality. It is very much appreciated by the community and is almost seen as a core characteristic of 'Auroville Education'. It has an enterprising character as individual projects like Mirramukhi, Centre for Further Learning (CFL), and TLC have shown over the years.
- This kind of a free market (free choice) education is challenging the community in two ways: each new initiative creates competition in the field of markets (students) and resources (teachers/money); and the educational community is challenged with the immanent question of its direction. Is theirs the right course and are we on the right course? What is Auroville and its education meant for?
- it is obvious that the individual impact of the struggle and controversies about the right course of education in the past still resonates in the decision-making processes of today. In some cases it has impact on the communication structure.
- In this logic/system each school is to be understood as a stand-alone enterprise, committed, economically reasonable, even complementary but *without* the responsibility to make good economic (educational!) sense for the community as a whole. This is a vertical stand-alone model and reflects very much the aspect of diversity, however not so much the aspect of unity. It doesn't reflect a common understanding of education. You don't find transparency therefore neither a leading educational value.

- 'Free Progress' is clearly defined by The Mother with regard to content as well as age group and individual qualifications. Since the term is being used differently in Auroville Education (for example, 'Free Progress approach' and 'a kind of Free Progress') it's difficult to understand from outside the day-to-day reality of Auroville what is being implemented in reality. In any case, there is no 'Free Progress', as stated by The Mother, below 7 years and only in exceptional cases from 7 to 14 years.
- If one argues strictly according to the theory of Integral Education, 'Free Progress' should be the appropriate method for the individual journey of 'self-revealing the unknown'. This would be so only for those who have the capacities. But each student is different, has different capacities. Out of practical situations Auroville Education had to address the reality apart from its ideals. The polarization between 'ideal' and 'reality' has been there from the very beginning and still exists in all fields, not only in education.
- Psychic education means to help the child to solve the problem of the true motive of his existence. 'Each human being is a self-developing soul and the business of both parents and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own...' (Sri Aurobindo in Tanmaya, p.145). This can't be part of a syllabus, it is a lifelong adventure. The parameters to promote the psychic being are the environment at large, the true teacher-student relation, as well as beauty, harmony, aspiration and grace. As all the project's surveys and interviews have shown, Auroville as a whole in its diversity is holding the space for the evolving psychic being. Auroville as a whole is promoting the aspect of Self-Revealing. (see objective 2a).
- In interviews and observations it became clear that, for example, the level of self-reflection of, and cooperation among, the students is quite

high. Sincerity and gratitude seem to be characteristic values.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

- Integral Education as a concept has been established during the development of the Ashram Education. It offered that in variations it could be adapted by 'all the nations of the world' (CWM 12, 293). Almost all comments, explanations and clarifications about the educational practice by The Mother have to be linked to the education developed and offered in the Ashram School.
- The Mother didn't support any direct transfer of educational experience from the Ashram to Auroville. She wanted that Auroville takes its own journey. Yet, the approach of 'Free Progress' was there from the very beginning, highlighted during Kireet Joshi's tenure as chairman of the Auroville Foundation from 1999 to 2004 and earlier through different publications and support for particular school environments (ie Mirramukhi and Last School).
- Education in Auroville has so far happened by default, by needs, balancing indirectly the meandering movements between education as Self-Revealing (individual) and education as Self-Expressing (social) and reflecting the different perceptions of Auroville in its becoming, in its diversity.
- Independent of the structure, the objectives or the methods of each school are expressed in Auroville's Charter, as the "place of an unending education"; this ideal seems to have the biggest impact on the socialisation of the students. "The upbringing as a whole was considered

an educational experience, reaching beyond schooling” (AES, p.24). In other words a physical place founded 50 years ago as the cradle of a new mankind, a place which ‘wants to work to hasten this event consciously’ (To be a true Aurovillian, para 5) alone generates a stimulating and adventurous spirit to discover the unknown - in a free way. This is unique in the world.

- After almost 5 decades of Auroville Education, its structure looks quite established. It represents two tracks. On one track a program-oriented choice which offers the possibility of studying and passing one or the other external school board exams, on the other an open-ended, creative ‘free-progress’ approach (see ‘Preface’ Auroville Education Survey, December 2016).

These schools of thought are an intrinsic part of the philosophy of Integral Education from the very beginning, even in the Ashram. They are representing two aspects of the same Integral Education. These are Self-Revealing and Self-Expression, however with a different emphasis. In other words it's a challenge between the ideal, the Dream of tomorrow and the reality, the needs of today; between the ‘new education for a new consciousness’ and the ‘traditional (old) education of a solid foundation for the world of today’. Auroville caters to both lines. But it looks like every-day reality and conventions are sometimes stronger than vague ideals. The known feels safer than the unknown. And it appears, at least for the time being, that after 50 years the conventional structures are holding steady.

To be practical you must first have a very clear vision of your goal, of where you are going.’ (The Mother, Aspiration Talks, 10.3.1970). The question of today has to be the reassurance of a common vision by the community. Only on this base one could find a unified perspective in all fields of development in Auroville - it's a step. But this comes from

inside. As we all understand, the supramental, the truth-consciousness is not manifest so far. So we have to make further progress with the number of people and the reality we know, initiating and stimulating at the same time a focussed discussion about a common vision of our goals. The trunks of our educational system are solid, verified through time but we should cultivate the branches to stimulate a new creative dynamic.

Even if Auroville as a whole is an educative society, the most significant time for a kind of formative, or even informative education, is up to the age of 16 to 18 years. Each society should address this evolving time with great awareness. Therefore we have the following recommendations:

- ❑ Auroville Education has always been short of teachers. Still today it needs during all development stages to the age of 18, more, reliable and qualified teachers. For sure the right teachers. But it might need further incentives like free housing, scaled maintenance, or for particular subjects external teachers from outside like the Ashram is doing. It is not a final solution but a step to respond to the needs of the students.
- ❑ Since the Auroville school environment has a vertical structure it needs an intense effort to open it in a horizontal way. Since the School Board has a more administrative function there should be a regular exchange of qualified teachers between the different schools, even participating in school and educational conferences. This kind of opening could lead to better communication and help to overcome negative assumptions.
- ❑ For the benefit of the students, and according to their suggestion, there should be structured and organized options to choose their subjects between schools, say between Future School and Last School, or Transition and Deepanam, without disturbing the unique character of each.

- ❑ Teacher training in a subject, as well as in methodology and didactics, should be organized for teachers from different schools.
- ❑ Teachers with the same subject, say Maths or History or English, from all schools should exchange regularly to develop a kind of continuity for the students through different grades.
- ❑ Since the Ashram School has a policy of 'certified school-leaving qualification' which is widely recognized, the newly formed and informal Auroville task group for recognition should find out if it might be helpful to Auroville students to offer them an 'Auroville School certification' to be provided without requiring a formal examination.
- ❑ If our educational diversity should progress to more unity we need a kind of core curriculum, at least for the subjects that are bound to a progressive and systematic learning process like Mathematics or sciences or languages.
- ❑ There should be a permanent information center for parents to get an update and an overview about the different school types, and at either the end or the beginning of the school year provide an information meeting about the different lines of education available. This could be organized by SAIER.
- ❑ Since education - besides self-revealing - is an individual development of different faculties in a chronological order, there should be an educational outline from primary till high school, a frame for 'continuity' to prevent repetition. For various historical reasons this is so far not the case. Continuity in diversity can be created.
- ❑ As the students formulated it already, as one finding of the Auroville Education Survey, there is a lack of understanding about Auroville with the students, but maybe with most of the residents too. Therefore there should be offers/classes addressing this issue from philosophical as well as political and economical perspectives (partly already addressed by the Global Citizenship course offered at Future School).

- ❑ We need to conduct a demographic survey to reveal the number of students in Auroville and their expectations in the years to come.
- ❑ Presently there are different 'checks' for a student to be admitted to a particular school - TLC, Future School, Last School, New Era Secondary School. A solution is urgently needed to meet the needs of the group of students who don't pass the 'checks' or don't want to be checked. Further, we have to observe the impact of these 'checks' for the students of lower grades who want to join our high schools.

Personal Remarks:

This report doesn't have the intention to reflect the truth, since it is always hidden. It's an 'objective' look from outside based on a transparent scientific methodology. After 50 years it is more than legitimate. Otherwise there is the danger to become a religion. 'No religion' The Mother said. Auroville as an educational environment, as a place for unending education is very much alive and vibrates 'A Dream' but we are not yet 'True Aurovilian'. There are structural and personal obstacles everyone is aware of and admits in interview situations. This paper only looks for structural recommendations. But personally I'm convinced that the educational society needs a healing. Too volatile, too competitive was the past in the field of education.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all the students and teachers and parents who were willing to share their insights with me and contributed substantially to this report. Living the Auroville experience for the truth.

7 Annex

Most of the interviews are recorded and available in transcript form. Since almost all teachers and a few students asked for anonymity we are listing only the general categories:

Who		From
16	teachers/ school coordinators	Kindergarten, Nandanam,
7	students (former)	all schools
5	conferences/workshops	all educational topics

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