



2016 Educateurs sans Frontières Assembly – NOTES

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I would like to thank all of you for inviting me to this gathering. You are some of the most committed people on the planet. Committed not just for your self-interest, but to humanity and to the cosmos.

We are at a point of transition in human evolution where humanity itself is passing through a crisis, the likes of which it has never seen before. Depending on what we do or don't do, life itself might survive or not. The situation is so precarious. The solution for us is not political, is not economic, is not social, is not institutional, but organizational or systemic. It is a crisis of consciousness; therefore, the solution is of consciousness, and a radical change of consciousness, not an incremental change.

We have reached a point where the human rationality, which was so guided by us, has failed us. There is something weaker, something more true, which needs to come forward and lead the journey ahead.

It is this, which in our approach to education, we see in the heart of every child. It is this, which seeks courage and assist in its own spontaneous and free emergence. And it is this that we as contributors have to become conscious of within ourselves; otherwise we cannot see it in our own children.

It was one hundred years ago that Sri Aurobindo articulated these ideas and he was a contemporary of Dr. Maria Montessori. It is interesting to see many common alignments of dates. She was born 2 years before Sri Aurobindo -1870 - Sri Aurobindo was born in 1872. She passed away 2 years after Sri Aurobindo, he was in 1950 and she went in 1952. They both began to write of their educational ideas around the same time. Sri Aurobindo in 1906, and think there was a book of Dr. Montessori that came out in 1907.

And later, during the Second World War, at the beginning of the Second World War, when she came to India, she stayed in Madras for 6 years at the Philosophical Society. It was barely a 150 km away from Sri Aurobindo, who was at Pondicherry at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Obviously there was connection, and there were many connections in fact. Some of the early followers of the Montessori system in India were all freedom fighters. They were all loosely connected with Sri Aurobindo. The really elite of Indian society were drawn to these wonderful ideas, and organized their execution nation wide.

And Sri Aurobindo, in 1906, when he wrote his precepts of education, it was because he had entered the freedom struggle to free India from colonial rule. The goal he set himself was not a political freedom only. He said we fight for freedom for India not because the British are good or bad rulers, but – and this is the grand vision we have to place before us – but because humanity is passing through grave transition where India has a crucial role to play. And before India can play her rightful role, she has to discover her soul. In order for her to discover her soul, she must be free; therefore, we fight for India's freedom. So it not just a political freedom, which was won in 1947, and you can see all that happened subsequently, that was not enough. And so he articulated a framework of education, for a national education for India. He left his work, which was very high paying; he became the principle of this national college in Calcutta to implement this education.

Of course all his ideas were still premature at the time, and humanity was still bound to that fascinating attraction of what we refer to as the industrial system of education, which is born in an industrial age, when there whole thinking is industrial, where everything is seen in terms of a factory and a model of production and mass production. The school itself was designed for creating workers for industry. The children are seen as raw material; the teachers are the machines of creating all the raw material to shape them, chop them, cut them, and twist them into shape. To predesign parts; you need a lawyer, you need a doctor, you need an engineer, you need a... In a society, which is itself a gigantic machine, where you replace cog pieces that are worn out.

This was the industrial mindset. I like this aspect of the mindset because finally it is not what you do with all the good intentions and all the right actions. If you have not changed the mindset, you will warp the outcome completely. This is the experience in India for the last 50 years where there have been attempts by the government to bring about changes of education. All the good it puts, it puts because the mindset behind it has never changed. This mindset was so overwhelming in that period, and Dr. Maria Montessori also fought against it, struggled against it.

These things worked, but they remain always small islands. Later Sri Aurobindo's work extended so significantly in the belief of the freedom struggle and shifted to Pondicherry and worked through a deeper spiritual awakening, and that was the beginning of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where I grew up.

It was in 1943 that a school was established in the ashram, where children from the Second World War as refugees came there. Then again there was contact between Dr. Maria Montessori and Sri Aurobindo, and The Mother, who was from France, who jointly founded the ashram with Sri Aurobindo. I will come to this toward the end of the session because there is a very interesting correspondence, which I would like to share with you.

It is in such a school that I grew up. All my education fortunately was there, and you will see some similarities, deep similarities. I grew up in a school where from kindergarten through to graduation of college we had no exams. That alone makes such a huge difference. The teachers are all residents of the ashram. None of them are paid. They are not doing it as a career; they do it because it is their children. We have classes, which are about 8 students per teacher. Especially when we reach college level, the students can choose their own teachers, their own subjects, and their own free work of the

curriculum. At that point, sometimes you have one or two students who are teachers. If both your teachers are away, that is no problem, you can pick who you want and work with them as you like.

There is a whole framework that has been developed, which Sri Aurobindo wrote about and it has been 100 years ago, and which was described as an integral education. Integral because the whole is an integral development of the personality, The Vedas used are integral, and the perspective, the whole approach and the understanding of the child is also integral. And I use the word integral as something from holistic. Holistic means that takes account the whole, but the whole can still be transformed pieces. Integral has a very specific sense that all of the whole is aligned and organized around the center. Integrated around the center. And what is that center?

In the industrial education we look at the child as a raw material, but in integral education we see the child first of all and foremost as the soul in evolution. And just that one shift changes everything, including our relationship with the child. Because not only the child is a soul in evolution, we also are souls in evolution. From a science perspective we would say, the soul even chose its environment because it had already a sense of purpose. It chose an environment conducive to the line of experiences it wanted. And it comes innate with the knowledge of how to develop that experience and the impulse that drives it through to fulfill that experience and realize it.

We ourselves are souls in evolution are not inferior or superior to the children. We are friends. We are children with them. We are all part of one gigantic, collective evolutionary awakening taking place in our cosmos, not just on earth. And so our relationship with the child also has a huge shift in the nature of the interactions. You can see all of this is not new to you, but it is the way we approach in the context of the framework set, which you will find complementing, perhaps even supplementing, or even identical with what you have heard.

And then Sri Aurobindo described and uses the vocabulary of the system of yoga in India, where we observe the framework of the human personality. And on that soul there are layers. Layers of, let's say, materials, substance, through which the soul acts into the world. And so we call them *koshas* – layers, sheaths – literally translated.

There is first the mind sheath, and then the life energy sheath, and then there is the physical or body substance sheath. They are meant to be instrumental of action in the world, but as they grow, and if they grow in hardening, and darkening, they become concealers of the souls actions and the soul's influence. And if early on, especially very early on, when people can bring the right alignment, then these sheaths can grow to become instruments, and it will be conscious instruments. Unlike what we see in most of the world today, where it will completely cover the life of the soul.

And the approach of education, Sri Aurobindo describes three principles of true teaching. These are in the tradition of India we have this word called *sutra*. *Sutra* is a very, pretty brief formulation of an entire ocean of knowledge and experience. The word *sutra* means thread. So it is like a rolled up thread; it is a little thing to stick in your pocket, but when you unwind the thread it goes on and on and on and means so much.

So when you take on this simple statement formulation *sutra*, you can draw from a huge experience - an ocean of knowledge.

So they are articulated as three *sutras* – **three principles of true teaching**.

1. The first principle of true teaching is that **nothing can be taught**. Nothing can be taught. And so you wonder what are we doing here? The reality is this, that you can attempt all you want to drill knowledge of experience into someone's mind, it is not going to happen. The only way it can happen is when that thing awakens within the person.

If you observe the whole process of learning. We can't go too deep into this thing because we don't want to use up all our time here. I am going to try and make a balance. If you observe the learning process within us, if someone tries to explain it to you, yes, you try to understand, but notice what happens. A part of you leans into the other person and identifies with what they are feeling, what they are thinking. In that moment of identification something clicks and you say, "Ah, I get it now." It is sudden. It is not something that enters you and works inside you, rather it is an identification where you are leaning into the other person and identifying and at the moment where there is a click of identification, you catch it.

You are the learner. All the other is somebody is trying to explain and you are trying to find it within yourself, and you don't see anything that aligns with what they speak of. Often it is your own classmate who sees differently than the teacher. He leans in and says, "You know what, look at it this way." And you shift your perspective. And "phht," there is a revelation and you see, "Ah, I get it."

That moment is the moment where you recognize you already knew it. The experience, the knowledge was already within you. You just did not know where it was and now you turned and you saw it and it came forward. There is no learning except of this kind within ourselves of what was already there.

This is a very profound idea and it goes to a deep knowledge, which unfortunately is not yet recognized by modern western psychology, which is still in its infancy. It sees evidence for it, but does not want to recognize it. The evidence is that within us is an access to all knowledge. Under hypnosis we are able to tap into all kinds of things, which we did not know we knew. For example, if you ask, "How many times did you breathe since you woke up?" I don't know. I did not count. Your conscious mind did not count, but your inner subliminal consciousness, which is massive – infinite – is aware, and if you process it you will be able to tap it.

But it is in that infinite foundation of universal consciousness of which we are an individualization; it is in that infinite foundation that all knowledge already exists. Our process of learning is just an emergence of what was already innate. How we help it emerge differs by whether we go by an internal introspective process or by an external identification with somebody else's experience, or visionary. And when there has been a skilled teacher can take an imprint of an experience and infuse it in another. Opening it like it was in the other. And again, it can emerge within in you because it was already there. So, the whole approach to learning now shifts. The idea that nothing can be taught. You can create an environment for emergence of what is already deep within.

So the relationship as teachers changes. We become not teachers but friends, guides, helpers, co-creators, co-discoverers, and our role is really catalytic where we assist that emergence.

But, in that attempt what is the right environment, and what means can we use which will assist? We have two gifts of nature. Nature has an enormous interest in ensuring the growth of the child. In the worst case it would be the child who is in the forest and the child is raised by a tiger and the child has to survive. So nature ensures that she has bounded in the child two special gifts, which will ensure his development, and should be our point to them as our greatest helpers.

We are still in the first principle of education. The other two principles will come later. So now we are talking about the two gifts of nature.

- The first gift of nature is that every child has an insatiable curiosity. Observe that. Encourage that. Nourish that. As parents, we tend to do the opposite. The children ask "silly" questions that lead to our discomfort.
 - ~ Where did I come from?
 - ~ Where did the sun go at night?
 - ~ What doesn't the rain fall up?
 - ~ Why do clouds form?

We say, "Oh, don't ask silly questions. Ask a teacher. I don't know. Don't disturb me now. Can't you see I am busy?"

And the child learns there he will not be helped if he asked these questions. So he will suppress these. And later the teachers will complain when the child is 12 years old, "Oh, children today are not interested in learning." That is not true at all. They are learning other things now because you stopped him from learning what they were interested in.

If we can nourish this right from the beginning, and sometimes we don't have answers. You can say, "You know, that is a very good question. I don't have an answer to that. I have been wondering that myself." You can start a discussion. You can initiate a process of inquiry and then tell me when you find an answer because I have been looking for this for a long time.

You set a relationship where the curiosity is going to be acknowledged and triggered all the time. Just that one thing, if you have sufficiently developed it, your role is over. For the rest of his life the child will find his own way. It may have been the experience for many of us here that we learned the most on our own and not in classrooms. We were pressed to learn it on our own, because that drive was there.

The school where I grew up where we did not have exams, people ask, "Well how do children learn? How do you motivate them?"

Well we have removed the motivation of fear or reward. So it goes to the real motivation, which is the joy of learning. It is basically instinctive that we want to inculcate the joy of learning. Every time they learn something, every time there is a discovery, there is an "Ah Ha! I know it." Something lighting up, and with it a great joy, because, and this is something that I am going very deep, which we discuss in the yogic tradition.

All children have been born with immortality. There is a simple branch. Children have been born with immortality. And immortality is their consciousness of divinity, which is fruit, consciousness, and bliss. Our soul is a really a revelation of that, part of that, shares of that. And every time there is a discovery of new knowledge, it is a discovery of ourselves. There is something deeper and there is always the joy that comes with it. And that joy is innate to our soul. It is the truth of our being - the truth of our existence. We are discovering something of ourselves. And that joy is so precious because it is causeless.

It does not have an opposite. It is not in the domain of duality where happiness is contrasted with sadness. What we teach children today, and this is very important, what we teach children today, to be happy - do this do that and you will be happy - and then happy is followed by sad, because that happy is a construct that is dependent on circumstances, a product of a process which inevitably has to exhaust. It has to end. It is a state of excitement, which tires the nerves, which will be followed by relapse into the reverse - the sadness.

But that derived which comes from the soul's innate being is not in the domain of duality because it is true it is real, it is self-existent. And that joy, when you begin to draw a relationship from that as your primary drive, primary motivation, you go through all life, through all difficulties, and it is always there. You are happy. And it is the true sense of happiness. It is the happiness we seek, which cannot be interrupted. So to make that the foundation of the motivation is the greatest gift you can give them.

In supporting that curiosity and getting the children to begin to find their delight on their own, is one of the keys, one of the gifts that nature has given us, one of the keys that leads the direction of the children.

- There is a second gift that nature has given, which is that every child is naturally a hero worshiper. Spontaneously, instinctively, they look for some sample, some example of the hero, someone who you want to be like. And you see, this continues through into

adulthood, even to the end of life. Let us each one of you look into your own life and see how there was one special teacher who inspired you. And to this day you remember that one teacher, and when you are in a difficulty, “What would she do in this situation?” “What did she do with us when we were like that?” And that becomes your reference.

Of course, in the beginning for the children, it is the parents who are their heroes. “I want to be like my mama, like my papa.” “My papa knows everything.” And all of these are reference points for them to come back. The example we set is the world into which they strive to grow. That is their only reference.

In the hero worship route there is something very deep happening. This spontaneous time to elect someone to identify with that which to hero worship. In the identification will combine, and here we will touch a very deep principle of yoga again. That identification with the power of absorption through identification, all is happening innately, will not happen consciously. But when we hero-worship someone or something, they are automatically identifying and drawing from there. This is how children with very little conscious input from us or effort from them could absorb everything that is happening around them. Dr. Montessori speaks of this Absorbent Mind, but the absorbent capacity itself is there is an instinct. What is happening during that absorption is some kind of identification, some kind of an idea from which we catch this.

So if we provide an environment, which is nourishing and healthy, and we set ourselves as the best example that we could be, then that is going to be effortlessly absorbed.

Unfortunately what happens, the father says, “If so and so calls tell him that I am not at home.” That example has been set that some people lie when it is convenient, or inconvenient. And at the same time I have spoken to the child, “Why do you lie?” And so what do they think?

But you see I am not a good example. I have my own difficulties. I have my own limitations. There are two things to do here. You set examples, great examples from history, from mythology. And that is why those stories are so fascinating for children and uplifting. You set examples of an ideal. Even with an ideal frame he struggles to work on his behavior. But the ideals, each one of them stand as powerful archetypes, and the children will very quickly catch that. And I myself, I set the best example by showing how at each moment I strive to be true to myself, to the best of my capacity. I fail. I get up. I strive again. That is the example. The example that you don't give up, the example that you set yourself an ideal and struggle toward it even when you have no dreams. I make a mistake. I hurt somebody. I get angry. I will immediately apologize, as soon as I am conscious enough and in control of myself, and in which I realize my error. I seize that and with efforts to connect with my elders. That is just an example.

So we have set now two different goals. Curiosity and examples from nature. You can see how this can be extended very quickly and in many different ways, including storytelling, role playing, theater, drawing, etc.

All of this is helping us with the first principle of true teaching.

We come now to the second principle of true teaching.

2. **The mind must be consulted in its own growth.** The second principle of true teaching - that the mind must be consulted in its own growth. Each child is unique, not only in the path with which it is growing, in the line of development it wants to and aspires to grow, but in the particular formulation for when creating a personality. You see in the Umi tradition we of two different aspects of our being. There is the consciousness within, going back to the soul of your awareness, and then there is the machinery of nature. We call it ??????. Both have natural tendencies.

I will just briefly outline this. Within the soul there is an aspirations, there are four aspects in particular. All four must eventually be developed. There is an impulse to knowledge, there is an impulse to leadership – to strength – to power, there is an impulse to harmony – organization – beauty, and an there is an impulse towards perfection – skills - service. These are the four impulses of the soul's powers, one of which predominates in each one of us. Eventually through our maturing is in the development of all four and the integration of one continuous stream or four facets perhaps.

But this is innate to each one of us. If you observe you will see that some of us are naturally drawn to knowledge. Those who are drawn to leadership you will find chose this way through leadership through education because one of these predominates and the other is secondary to it. For some it is the leadership first, and then the educational aspect follows. And for others it is the educational aspect first and then the leadership through education aspect follows. Usually one predominates and one is secondary to it. But the other two if they are not sufficiently developed, you will always be dependent upon someone else on your team to fill in for those. The most developed in humanity are those who can enter any space and be complete and effective in creativity and those are the ones who have developed and integrated. So this is how we are and we grow. But this is coming from the consciousness within.

There is also something else, which is in the nature within us. In these three areas of the mind, the emotion, and the physical body. The yogic system describes this in terms of three tendencies, three gunas – that you have heard of perhaps, three qualities. There is first the tendency of inertia, second kinesthesia (action), and the third illumination. We call it *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattwa*. I will avoid the vocabulary for the convenience of people here.

But the inertia wants to balance the body - is the tendency to just come back to rest and do nothing. And it is there in the body. It is there in the mind also sometimes. The mind does not like to make an effort. It wants to come back to rest and just be in a stupor. Now there is a truth in it. There is a foundation of stability. You come back to a state of stability. Each of these has dual aspects.

So this has to corrected by the tendency to activity. So we make and force the body to exercise, to run around. Or use the stimulus within the curiosity to get the child to explore and overcome the inertia. But that exaggerated can become restlessness - agitation. So that is directed by the *sattwa* – the illumination – which brings the balance harmony in right alignment, precision in the balance of things, just try and always taking the little path.

This feeling of illumination is when your are conscious and when you are able to choose consciously. But if illumination does not have sufficient support of the energy of activity, it falls very quickly into inertia. All these three exists within us. In education we try to remove inertia, organize the kinesthesia, and increase the illumination. To the extent that we are able to do that, we have created in the consciousness in the nature of the person a state in which they are in charge of themselves. Otherwise we are struggling against our own instruments. The spirit willing, but the flesh is weak. What do you do, but stand in the flesh, and so on.

So I am just touching upon this to show that there is a whole complexity of the psychology of the human being and we have to take that into account. And finally, it comes at a very practical level that where we have to recognize that each child being unique you have to refer to the child's needs, the child's interests, the parents' state of development of the child, and support that. In the Montessori framework you see how simply this is done. You place before the children all the means, and they will find what is interesting for them.

And here is a very interesting clue when we observe the psychology of the child, and ourselves as adults as we are big children. What is interesting for us now is that which currently in the development is the focus of nature's instinct. If you want to know what to do with a child, what should you give him, observe

what is interesting for him at this moment. That is the particular layer which nature is developing. To experiment with that, explore that; apply that is the most interesting activity.

Let's explore, what is this thing called "interesting" and "not interesting." Consider, you go to some sort of a program, let's so you go to a lecture or a music program, and you come back and say, "Wow! That was fascinating! It was so wonderful!" and you go to another and you come back and say, "That was so boring!" What is the difference between them essentially in your experience subjectively? What is the difference between the two? What made this interesting and that not interesting?

From the audience: connection, attitude, experience.

Yes. They are all pointing to something very important. In the interesting one, I went in one person and I came out a different person. I grew through that experience. In the boring one, I went in as one person and I came out as the same person. Interesting equals growth. Growth equals interesting. It is such an interesting idea. We just grew here inside. (Giggles)

You notice in the child he is interested when he is growing; he gets bored when he is not growing anymore, and the reverse. You create an environment where there is potential for growth and he will be interested. But now there is growth, and there is growth, and there is growth.

So when I went to my first party, it was interesting. I went to the roller coaster, it was very interesting, I go a second time and it was been there done that. Third time was very boring.

So the things, which can provide a very small, incremental, short-term growth, are novelty only. But what will I grow from in real long-term, meaningful, lasting terms? Not much. And then there are other things where I can go there again, and again, and again, and each time there is something new, something to learn, something to grow, something that I had never realized before.

Perhaps some of you have this experience when you read the writings of Maria Montessori. The first time you read it you understood something. And the second time you read it you understood something more. And after 10 years, you review the same passage and "My god. There is so much there, which I missed the first 2 times." Because the intent itself is rich, deep, multifaceted. It is emerging from a living experience and the force of a multi-dimensional experience. It carries something deeper.

Unlike a mathematics formula – 2 plus 2 is it equals 4. Yes. Been there done that. It has not changed. If you go to a lot of what is taught today in education in the conventional exam system, there are simple fact based responses. I know facts, so what? Does it change me anyway?

One of the exams they had in India was, "How many wives did King Henry the VIII have and name them?" What value does it have for my life? Are you asking me to have many wives? Is that the example you are setting? What is the point of it?

In Bombay, there was an exam for little children, for kindergarten. It was an elite school so they had an exam for kindergarten. There were questions like: Name the Prime Minister of England, name your parents, name your address, and name that rotating object on the top of the helicopter. What are you trying to do there?

Of course there is a specialty, but before the mind is ready, it is not ready for that. Children who go to conventional kindergarten before the age of three, they have damaged minds. There are less able in later years, less confident, and they have difficulty.

Dyslexia, in fact, is nothing but accelerated development when you have skipped one of the stages of development. The brain itself organizes around the lines of the mind in layers of faculties. And there is a particular layer of activation in which it learns to differentiate between the symmetries of left and right. And

if in the race to speed up the handling of faculties, which are too advanced, you skip this stage. And go onto the next faculty, now I get mental abstractions of numbers, but have not yet handled the mirror imaging, and so I still have problems with b and d, or 6 and 9, or whatever form it takes. It is just skipping a stage. Now all this today is validated with scans. You can see in the brain what has been skipped. It is as simple as that.

Now all this going back to the starting point. The child must be in a small group and you must first reference the child's interest. The first thing you do with children is observe them. When you observe them, after awhile, the child will reveal to you what is needed. So at that point your job is to assist and support. To provide whatever is needed. But you understand why and how this whole thing works. The principle itself can now be widened, very rich and very wide.

And now to the third principle of true teaching.

3. The third principle of true teaching - **to grow from the near to the far**. Very simply stated, but because it is stated in abstraction you see it can be applied everywhere. Its most obvious applications to go from the near reaches of the senses to the far reaches of abstraction of abstract radius. And you see how the Montessori system gives this basic timeline of development.

But within the content of a day's activity, you can apply the near and far. Start the day with things which are most accessible, most near to the child, and then go to the more abstract. Within the realm of the child's interest, what is near to my heart, what is interesting for me, to that which is far, which is not so interesting to me. You can sequence in this way.

So the principle itself can be applied in many different dimensions. If you are teaching history, let's start with your own history, your own environment and then grow to the more abstract. Unlike the current system in India, and most of the world, who start with ancient civilizations, where you read about Roman, Greeks and Egypt. But you don't speak about THE most ancient civilization that is still surviving, which is India. Why is that? Well because the framework was still set by colonial past. But there is not even an attempt here. And this is the sad part.

So near to far I can go into more detail, but you see these three principles now: 1. Nothing can be taught, 2. The mind must be consulted in its own growth, and 3. To grow from the near to the far. These three together, any time you have a problem, and I don't know what to do in this situation, go to these three and you'll find the truth, because they are together complete, very pretty sutras.

But in that actual process of learning, in the great interaction, in the free work, it was our privilege to create our own textbooks in the ashram school. Tuned to the requirements of the children, we worked together through project work, through activities, real-life activities, and so on. None of that is new to you. I am skipping it. The point was you could tune into the class at the end of the day, and adapt to whatever you might have planned to their input at the end of the day. You channel the enthusiasm and interests of the class into a direction, which is not proposing but guides it into a direction, which perhaps you have as your interest.

All of these skills are a necessary ways in which we can become effective in the classroom. It means we have to be extremely creative. We have to develop ourselves in transformative ways. That is where we grow. It is not that we come here already we learned different thing. We come to children and now we teach them. We grow with them. With each passing year as our children are different, we have to grow to adapt and to learn with them, from them, and to learn from those situations.

We have had big problem in the last 15 years, which is television. It is a universal problem. We had never had to face that before. Now it is has become such a huge disease. We have been experimenting and our teachers found ways around it.

I can share one, which we found to be effective. We have the children do some activities toward the end of the day in the classroom, some activity, which is very interesting to the child. And when it is time, he does not want to stop. We say, all right, you can take it home. So he takes something home in the community, which can replace now the television.

Of course a lot of this has to do with educated parents. That becomes our biggest challenge. We will say, especially when you are in schools which are in an environment which is so complete, the first thing I will emphasize to every school is start talking to your parents. Get them to recognize the values, the principles, the things you are doing, why you are doing, how you are doing. Back it up with evidence from modern research. There is so much research today to support it. But you have to show them that; take them out, give it to them, and show it to them. Tell them bluntly that forcing a child to learn the maths tables before the brain is ready will cause dyslexia. Say, do you want your child to be dyslexic? In our school we don't teach them writing until they start writing fully at the age of six or seven. Before that, yes, you have been using your hands to draw and to get your basic motor skills, but much of the work is oral, visual. At that age, suddenly within six months they catch up with what other children have been struggling for for six years. Because you have matched the timing with the brain/mind and now the system are ready. And you have prepared for it with things, which they were ready for at those ages. You have to explain this to the parents.

Of course we have the evidence. It is not like the Montessori system has started today. We have the evidence going back a 100 years. Dig out the research and place it before them. It makes a huge difference when people see printed-paper and saying, look this is it. And if the research is 30-page paper thing, wave it before them. They are not going to read it. It helps to see a printout. So please make use of this and educate the parent.

So when we work with public schools that are trying to make a transition, the first thing we do, we work with the teachers, and then we follow up with the parents. We have to have them on our side.

Then we ask them to do a few things. We tell them look, it is convenient for you to leave your child in front of the T.V. because it allows you to do what you want and you are not disturbed, but now we discuss what happens. When you are watching T.V., observe your child. You will see the pupils are dilated, he does not blink, and these are classic symptoms of mild hypnosis. Your child is under hypnosis while he is watching T.V. And everything he is watching is going straight into the subconscious. That is how he learns all those swear words, that is how he becomes violent, because everything on T.V. is violent, including your cartoons. The cartoon is beating up somebody all the time; you just don't see blood. That is the only difference. And the guy is all shaken up and then goes back and beats him up. And then they are beating up each other. And that is what is going into your child's subconscious. And tomorrow, without being conscious, up it pops as his behavior. Do you really want that?

So we don't have options. So now we should be ready, here are the things you can do. And we should be able to provide them with things - So books, videos if you want. Find in your own context, within your own culture, what is useful, what is helpful and activities.

And then, if possible, we align what we do in school with what we do at home. We say, look we are going to do this, you can supplement with this. Or we allow you to take these tools, or we allow you to take them at home. Whatever it takes, depending on the age group. We have to take them on and make them also part of our work. You cannot separate home from the school. All teachers are parents, and all parents have to be good teachers.

So it is a difficult process unfortunately because society is still in the industrial mindset stage. In the modern research we observe also what happens in the whole approach to parent education. Sri Aurobindo writes about this 100 years ago and he says, it is the cause of the fickleness of the modern

mind, teaching in snippets. Typically we find that children get restless after about 30 minutes. And adults get restless after 30 minutes. If you go to a public function somebody is speaking, after about 30 minutes suddenly the audience leans back and starts looking around. And do you know why? They have been programmed from childhood that the school bell that goes off after 30 minutes. And now it is television where you have been programmed now for 20 minutes serials, with ads in between which go every 5 minutes. So after 5 minutes you are saying where is the ad? Where are the breaks? For the school bell that is a very deep programming.

You have been taught to break concentration. The reality is this, if you really want to go deep into any learning. Observe what the mind does. Look at what the children do when they are driven to do their exams. They sit down, take one thing and hammer away at it for 2 hours, until they are so fed up that they throw it away. They say, mommy, I am sick of this. Ahh. Go around. Full around. Parents who are saying. You should prepare, you should work.

After awhile when they have recovered, they go back, and again pound away at the same thing. And here you get a clue, once you go inside the brain, inside the mind when we are learning something. We are not speaking of younger children, but of late teenage. When the brain is sufficiently developed that you can learn, and guided to do something with a choice.

So this is what is happening. In the first phase you are taking in, and we are matching with MRI scan observations. So in the MRI scan we can watch the brain while you are learning. We find in the first phase as you are learning, the information is going in and is stored in the temporal area of the brain.

Then you stop. You set aside the books. And you go to play in the garden. At that point the brain is processing, and we watch how is it integrating all this and storing in the permanent memory. That is when the real learning is taking place. That is when it is getting imprinted for good. When you are doing nothing and playing in the garden.

And interesting thing was in the MRI scan observation, if at the end of the first session of absorption you switched classes and went to the next learning. The new learning goes in and replaces the learning in your temporary memory before it has a chance to go into permanent memory.

And this is the factory of current teaching. Class 1 – Physics. Class 2 – Geography. Class 3 – Language, etc. What you are doing each time the teacher comes and erases the blackboard. Symbolically we are erasing what was in the temporary memory. So when the child comes home and you ask the child what did you learn today? Oh, the usual thing. Tell me, tell me. I am very interested. And he makes an effort, and he can only recall the last class, because all the stuff has been erased. When he reviews it, it looks new. What a waste of time, a waste of energy. After had making the class all day. What a torture for the children.

If we observe what is happening in the brain and now we tune our structure for it. You see the instinct, after the absorption is to go and play. Allow for the assimilation. And that happens automatically. You don't have to do anything. In fact, you should not interfere with it. The recommended thing to do is do nothing.

At a university they did an experiment. They did not know what they were doing. They just did an experiment. Between two classes there is a five minute for a transition between classrooms. They made the children sit down and chant ohm. They found improved retention. Dramatically improved retention. What happened during the chanting of ohm? Well, you did nothing. You made your mind blank, and it allowed for the assimilation process. But no, there is something else that happens. When you have assimilated, something at the end of the assimilation kicks in and the instinct builds outwards. The child comes home and says, mommy you know what we did today? And he starts repeating, and if it was

something he saw you do, which was accessible, he wants to do it at home. He will want to show you. He wants to exhibit it; express it. That completes the cycle.

So the first step is absorption, the second step assimilation, and the third step re-expression. This is happening at all levels of education, even little children. There is a period of assimilation. They are doing something, when they are full; they stop and stare out into space. They are doing nothing in particular. They are looking at others. Let them be. Don't have to keep them active. Activity needs have to be balanced with the opposite inactivity and rest. When things are happening, and after awhile spontaneously he will reach out and want to do something. Until it will be taking the new things, the same things in a new way, or be shifting into a different activity.

Now we understand what is happening, then we can assist. You need to tell this to parents. All I have been saying is already known to you. But I am saying this because this is the stuff you can tell parents and explain to them in terms which are vocabulary of science and which is accessible to them. But they understand, and you can train parents and then very quickly they will assist you.

And then there transition schools, which are sometimes what you would call the most elite, where the parents are the most extreme in conventional thinking. And after a session of an hour or two, people will say, you know what, we never thought about all these things. This is so new. This is so fascinating. What can we do? Then they are ready, and you should be ready to tell them what they should do. This needs to happen over years, it should not happen too quickly.

Here is the way of learning; here is the scientific research which is based on what is going on inside. And tell them this, when you are watching children preparing for an exam, when you watch them doing their studies, accept this, that this is a three-step process.

Many parents complain, my child has no concentration. He is totally distracted. I said, what do you mean? Well he has been studying, and then he stops his studying and he goes off with his friends. After how much time? Well he has been studying for one hour and then he stops and plays with his friends. So then you have to explain that this is a necessary thing. That he needs to allow the assimilation process. Once they understand, they don't worry any more.

I thought these would be useful tools to give parents. But also you can see how the same things you know in a certain vocabulary comes to a perspective, you can look at it now from a different vocabulary, from a different approach, from different sides, from other viewpoints, and it helps us see things more richly.

When we try to assist, especially as children grow older, we want to increase this power of concentration. So let me just step back for a moment. In all of current teaching, our focus is on subjects and information. But in the approach we take, in alternative education and the Montessori approach we have similarities. It is not the information that matters most, it is what you do with the information. So we focus on the development of faculties of the world. Information is secondary and incidental. So now they are teaching you physics, or mathematics, or history. Let us first think about what are the faculties that we want to develop and stimulate.

And then I can articulate that in terms of the vocabulary of the subject that we are on. I don't have a particular affiliation to a subject based culture, because knowledge is one continuous domain. You can't cut it into pieces. The subject divisions are artificial division based on industrial thinking, but useful when we enter more specialized domains of knowledge and experience.

But for the other ages we want to have this process of continuity, of experience, of knowledge experience.

So at that point I come into the class with a certain orientation, I watch the children, I sense what is the normal direction, and then I feel the intent of the subject as necessary to orient the faculties of whatever they want.

So one of the things I do with little children is in the very early stages of the year, I ask each one of what is their special interest? What is it that fascinates you? And get to know their special areas. Somebody said I am interested in animals. And someone is interested in the trees. And someone is into planets and the solar system.

Then I can use any subject as a window to help develop the faculties and use the experiences that they want to for that class. And that is our skill as teachers, because you should notice, because knowledge is one continuity. You can make any subject as a window.

I was very bored with biologic because of the way they did it. I was interested in computers, so a skilled teacher would say, all right let us study the world's most modern computer, that is your brain. Let's talk robotics; that is your body. It is not difficult. You can bridge anything with anything. Take the child's most interesting subject and take it to his most boring or most inhospitable experience.

As soon as we shift the focus to faculties, this becomes easy. But, we have certain faculties, which allow the development of other faculties. If we can focus on these early on, everything else becomes easy.

Sri Aurobindo says something very interesting about this. He says, "If I had to do my education all over again, I would not waste time on subjects. Instead I would focus on developing my power of concentration and equality. Once I mastered these I could master any subject at will."

Concentration and what's is the second? Equality. I will touch upon the second one briefly, but first concentration. It is obvious why.

Concentration: it is at the point you concentrate that the break through happens. But, what is concentration itself? Psychologically, subjectively, what is happening in us when we concentrate?

We notice that we bring a whole consciousness into a narrow focus and to a one-pointed focus. And when we have completed that one-pointedness, it is as if the whole world fades away. We are oblivious to everything else. In that one-pointed focus, we are like a laser beam. We cut through the appearance and touch the essence. Touch the soul of what we seek to know. In that contact is the identification, the discovery, the illumination, the "Ah Ha!" experience. Ah Ha! I know it. I already knew it! I just discovered, uncovered, recovered.

So centering is cutting through, by the power of that exclusive focus that leads to an identification. This capacity to narrow, to make a one-pointed focus is a skill. Like all skills it can be trained by practice. As adults we are required sometimes to concentrate on things that we don't like to concentrate on, which don't interest us. As children, since they are not conscious enough to be able to make that effort, we just give them things that interest them. And, leave them without interruption as long as possible in that immersion and the capacity to concentrate grows by itself. So we watch them as they are immersed. When they stop, they look away, we watch for when they are ready for the next thing, we guide them to something else, or they find their own thing, and let them stay immersed; do not interfere.

If they are daydreaming also, depending on the age, allow them that state; complete immersion in the daydream. These are all exercises by which they are developing something. Leave them, as they become more conscious, and are able to direct their attention consciously, we will make them aware. Look you can do this. I need to hold you attention, and that is when you make your breakthrough.

With little children we may also do simple exercises. They are things, which we use to do as children in kindergarten, in the third year of kindergarten. We set up a little flame. And you say we will sit very silent and watch the base of the flame. Just remain watching without looking at any thing else. Without thinking of anything else and just watch that. And we do it, it is fascinating, it is interesting, and that is it.

When they are becoming more conscious, especially of their own thoughts and the way they think, we can talk to them and say, you know what, you can make your mind silent. You can remove these distracting thoughts and focus on what you want. Try it. It will be interesting. And the child will actually try it. And when he does it, it is such a joyous experience, wow, I can actually change how I think. And, they start experimenting very quickly.

So you will watch, and sometimes many children are very early in their awareness. If you catch such children, you can even speak to them at an early age. So just watch for that greater consciousness. But lead them on as they become older. We are going to tell them this. Here are exercises that you can do to develop your power of concentration. Like muscles, it is something that is develops by use. You don't do it; it will tend to weaken with time.

The same with **willpower**, which Sri Aurobindo puts as the other complicating principle, concentration and willpower. With these two together you can do anything in life. So we need to consciously develop these two faculties.

So I am going to speak some about equality. I am going to touch upon this briefly. When you seek knowledge, and especially when you seek knowledge that is not informational but intuitive, you want an insight, you want to know something deep, from within the soul of things, the concentration cuts through. But a state of receptivity, where your mind is silent and without preconception, without agitation, without bias, allows for the knowledge to reflect without distortion. Does that make sense? Your state of receptivity, which is without bias and without agitation, is like the screen of which the thing you are seeking to know and it reflects continuously, like the sun reflects on still waters. If the waters are agitated, the light is all broken up; you do not see the sun. Our mind is like that. And the knowledge is above, and the knowledge reflects in the still mind and you see, see it all. Not just see, you experience, you live it. That is known as an intuitive moment.

All knowledge is essentially intuitively felt in some deep part within us, and then a part of that reflects on the surface as a thought out knowledge. Notice when you have the "Ah Ha!" experience. Ah Ha! I know it, and then you rush out to articulate, but wait a moment; let me think; let me find the words. A part of you knows what you want to say, but you don't have any of the words. You have not yet put it into formal thoughts. There is a process now of translating an experience into thoughts, and then into words. But you can train yourself to grow and to be in that thoughtless awareness, which is an intuitive knowledge experience.

Little children tend to have that much more easily, and spontaneously. When they learn to think more, the activity of thought tends to blur and cover up this intuitive way. That is when we say they don't feel so easily with the heart, because the intuitive means you know things from the heart. You know things you don't know how to articulate as children.

So we want to develop also this equality respect. I will just touch upon this briefly. We need to go back to our faculties: concentration, willpower - these are our primary faculties. And willpower with little children is done in the same way. Here is thing, which is difficult, I persist, and I overcome, and the joy will happen. That becomes my motivation.

With older children you will tell them this. You see what a joy it is when you work hard. And then you will give them tools and means to develop. So with older children I tell them this. I say, think of one simple activity. So simple that you have no excuse to not do it. Every morning after you have had you're your

breakfast, you take your plate or your cup and you will you yourself wash it. How long does it take - 15 seconds to do it well? 20 seconds. So there is no excuse, even if you are late for school, you can do it 15 seconds. But you do it. You force yourself to do it. The day you forget, the moment you remember, you will get up and get that cup and wash it. So I forgot, I remember later, and although the cup is already washed, I am going to pick it up and do it again. And you persist in doing something very simple.

So the technique is like you are building muscles. You don't lift 100 kilos; you will tear your muscles. You take a 1 kilo weight and pump a 100 times. So you take this little cup and do it every day for the next two months. And if you have done it for two months, you will notice already by the third month everything you want to do elsewhere in life, everything because easier, your willpower has grown stronger.

And same with concentration. If you have an exercise, it can be very boring, but now they are old enough to do something they would like to do. It may be something simple like taking big print newspaper headline. And with your eyes you follow the outline of the text, appreciate it one-by-one. Slowly watching the texture of the paper, the smudge of the ink, and just follow it mechanically. This is a power of concentration exercise. You interest does not help. It does not matter, but I tell them the day you can do one full line of a children's book like this, your power of concentration will be strong enough that you will see its affects on everything else that you do. The day you can do one page, you will have the capacity to do whatever you want to do.

And I have had children come in with dyslexia, with complete ADHD, or whatever names you give to these things which have been treated with medicines. Have them go through this exercise and within a month or two they will change completely. In one case a child who had absolutely no capacity for mathematics, no concentration, in a casual conversation his hands were swinging like he was doing ??? Completely disoriented. After a year of persistent exercise, and he did it on his own. He was just shown once. He wanted to get through his struggle. After a year he was teaching maths to his classmates. That was the extent of it and he joined the ????? and he went into something., which was impossible in the way he was just before. And one simple exercise changes all that. To be conscious the key is concentration. Everything else, all the faculties will grow on their own if you peruse the concentration.

So I leave these with you as a backdrop. I grew up in the school. I am a product of that. I had the freedom to do pretty much everything I wanted to do, and so I was the head of my class in most subjects that interested me. I skipped some subjects that did not interest, but the broad base of faculties allowed me to take them up later and run through it and learn whatever I needed to do, and so on, but the broad flexibility of study, which allowed things to grow freely.

This school has a strong connection with Maria Montessori. I wanted to end with this. She came to India and she was for six years in Madras, pretty much in the house arrest because of the Second World War and the political situation with British fighting Italy. Then she was allowed to go for lectures and so on. So she traveled to a few places in India.

But it was here that she had the most extraordinary insights, as you know from her books. She watched a child and the mother and an interaction and the bond, and she developed from it a whole new dimension to education. And so I would like to remind people that you have to understand her not so much as an educator first, but as a mystic first. She was a mystic first and foremost, applying her insight into the cosmos and into humanity and human nature in the domain of education.

And that is how we understand this power. She observes a single incident and out of that draws out this whole thing. It was a little incident, which to us would have just been another day. But from that an insight, a revelation, and then the power to articulate that revelation in a way that inspires others. To build it in a framework, which you can understand, which is rational, philosophical, even metaphysical, and you read it and you say wow, yes, this makes sense. It resonates with my heart. That is the power. But the insight itself, is a mystical insight.

She had to modulate her language to match the circumstances of the society of the age, of the period. You can see from that there is something being said, but what is meant is much more deep. The words stop short because that is all that can be said without getting into trouble. As you know she did get into trouble with the Italian government at some point, and all that. So you have to see and read all the writings with this sense, and then you will find so much more that comes.

So during the time she was there, she wrote *The Secret of Childhood*. So 1943 December, she wrote and inscribed one of the books to Sri Aurobindo. She wrote in the book:

To Sri Aurobindo,

With devotion and gratitude,

*Maria Montessori
December 1943*

So I have this photocopy of this page where she wrote this, and it is addressed to Pondicherry.

The interesting part is this year I had to speak at a program in Bombay at The National Conference of Montessori in India. Two weeks before that somebody came to my house. She was the mother of a classmate of my. We grew up together since kindergarten. This mother came. I still don't remember why she came. And incidentally I mentioned, I don't know why, that I was going just within two weeks to Bombay for the speaking. And she said, oh yes! My husband was Maria Montessori's secretary – publisher. He was a publisher. He was with her for many years up in Calcutta. He was with her for many years. He knew Sri Aurobindo, and he was corresponding with Sri Aurobindo, finally he settled in the ashram and his son was my classmate. Very interesting chain of coincidences. So there was a very close connection because they will all have belonged to the elite of India at that time.

As it turns out I was told, but I don't have unfortunately more copies, but I was told that she was at the ashram, but I have a letter from her that was addressed to the students of the ashram school. I mentioned to you that the school was started in 1943, when the children came as refugees from the Second World War. The Mother said, but so far the ashram is a very closed community entirely focused on spiritual development. And she said, here is opportunity to build the new humanity without the preprogramming that we have to unlearn. And Sri Aurobindo has set this mode of education. She used the opportunity to start the school. At that point Dr. Maria Montessori was in Chennai. She sent this letter, which was read out on the opening day of the school.

I want to read it out to you. This is on AMI letterhead at that time.

To the children of the Ashram School, Pondicherry,

Yours is the world of the spirit. In the midst of all that is (high?), the new world of freedom that is being constructed for you. Go and give the possibility to all the divine powers that God has put into you, to explain, and to uplift. This will be your way of offering yourselves to God and to his will. You will grow and be the ones who fill the world to be bright, beautiful, and happy.

Maria Montessori

It is so beautiful. I have three copies here that you can share with others. I think it is worth it to put up in your school if you like.

But you can see here the more spiritual and that mystic dimension of her, and she saw education in this sense. It was not for her just a social and not just an educational thing.

There was a beautiful quotation right at the beginning at it talked about social, and I thought to myself that she had to do that because that was the only way that it could be acceptable to people who could not understand the word spiritual. This is a spiritual cause, not a social cause; it is a spiritual cause. You can see it in the writing that she saw it in that way.

When she speaks of this cosmic purpose, it is because she sees the cosmos as one. For us, it is not something we just get. Yeah we have to connect the child to everything in nature. We have to learn to see as she saw the unity of the whole world as part of the cosmos. And see the world itself as a manifestation of the divine. The oneness becoming multiple. God is not something up there dictating terms and not giving us and encouraging or rewarding. God is manifest in the world as one. Everything around us is divine. It is that divinity which is concealed in form, which is struggling to emerge. Its emergence is what we call evolution. Every plant is nothing but a divine presence of things, reaching out, emerging from the rock, where it has escaped and expressing the capacity of feelings, and animals expressing emotions, and the human thinking. We are the divine presence, waking up, discovering itself, and becoming co-creators in the divine manifestation. That is the what we have in the Montessori framework of education.

We have to consciously tune ourselves in to begin to see the world in this way, and to bring to our children this way; our whole interaction with them in this way. I believe if we can just do this much, the whole framework of the system grows out of it effortlessly. You don't have to learn and think. You will only resonate with the distinct vision, and you will feel, oh yes, this is true. This is right, and I know it and I already knew it, you just made me conscious of what I knew, and I do it.

One of the most moving experiences I had was when approved the head of the Kindergarten in the Ashram school. She is now 78 or 80. She was 12 years old when The Mother gave her the assignment of being head of the kindergarten, a school that was just starting. She was 12 years old. So she goes to The Mother, and says, but I don't know anything about teaching, what should I do?

So she shared with us this idea. So we were a group of teachers from Bombay. Somebody asked her, what was the single most important thing we should do with children? And she thought a while, 80 years, 70 years of experience. And then she said, Love! Love the children. Everything else will follow. And this was the advice that The Mother gave her. She said, to begin and just love the children, and the rest follows. Because love is that important part of us, which is the original movement of the divine consciousness embracing the universe and drawing it back to itself. It is that divine power that embraces, and draws back divinity which brings together the universe, which awakens the life, which awakens mind, which brings us together as friends, which makes the atoms connect with each other, and bind to each other to form molecules, which brings and holds nature together. It is the single most powerful force in the universe.

And when we love, we share in the love of the divine cosmos. We become means of its expression. And with our children, we can pull from them that same love. They teach us how to love them. They provide our hearts with love. We say Oh! And they teach us. There is growth. It is in that bond everything emerges spontaneously, truly, all knowledge, all right action, spontaneously happens. You don't feel it doing something, it just happens. So this is the second most important thing that we should all be doing and allowing.

So we will pause here. I have taken a more time than I should have because we were a little flexible. I am inviting questions if we have time.

Q/A session.

(In conclusion:)

I started with the wide picture of the crisis human evolution and in humanity. One of the most important things, which we must tune into if we are to be affective as change agents in this transition, is to align ourselves to the larger higher fruit, the future that is manifesting. We will do this as we have children in our school. Make of us the hero warriors that we aspire to become. May we will fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born, against the past that seeks to endure, so that the new things may manifest, and we will be ready to receive them. It encapsulates this. There is a future, there is a new consciousness; a new world which is waiting to be born. And there is an old world, which is dying. We are in a transition of an age. And all of these new experiments, new approaches in education, in finance, in society, in every field, even science.

All the attempts of the new consciousness need to organize itself. It has not yet found the ways it goes and the means, and even the organizational structures. Everything had to be newly built. There is where we are playing the script. Things that have never been done before have to be done by a new force created. It helps if we consciously align ourselves to this new consciousness, to this cosmic purpose. When we commit ourselves to something greater than ourselves. When the greatness of that fills us with its energy, with its wisdom, with its strength, we are able to do more with people on our own. We become in a sense instruments of divine power, a divine purpose. It is very important for us to remind ourselves of this consciously every day. Why am I here? To serve this evolution. To serve this greater purpose. To serve the divine. Whatever the vocabulary that you feel naturally.

Who am I? I am a part of this cosmos. I am part of the divine consciousness and the conscious soul in evolution. Remind yourself of this everyday, and you will find that this, whatever you're the external circumstances, however difficult they may have appeared to you at the beginning, everything becomes part of something beautiful, a discovery, an adventure, a new exploration, finding new forms, creating new things, and you will enjoy every moment of it on a deep level. Even as your struggle with circumstances, they won't seem to be difficult anymore. It may take time perhaps, but they are not difficult, they just need patience and persistence. And the skill of finding the right way around the things. Those prescriptive changes become in the yogic tradition we call it (Leila?) - the divine plane (?). When we become conscious participants, when we put ourselves consciously in that larger context. When we loose that, when we forget that, I am an individual struggling, fighting, and I am always in tension. Integration is very easy to do, but you must do it every day consciously.

Thank you.