SAIIER Annual Report – Sub-unit

1. Name of sub-unit: TLC The Learning Community

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4. Introduction:

Educational research is at the core of our work in TLC, as we strive to find ways to implement Integral Education. Everything we do is research oriented and innovative. A philosophy of education with so much depth, as described by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, will require a long and conscious journey. TLC is an intentional learning community for families who reside and work in Auroville. We aim at implementing a living and growing research into Integral Education as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Sri Aurobindo’s three principles guide us in this process, and the children show us the way.

5. Enrollment/beneficiaries:

We currently work with children aged 6-13 as well as their parents.

During this academic year we have worked with 19 children and their families.

For the coming academic year we are expecting around 28 children and their families.

6. Activities of the year:

Following are a few of the projects that have been carried out this year:

i) Evergreen Explorations

During the first months of the academic year, several of TLC’s younger children met twice a week in Evergreen community for a morning of free exploration. Activities emerged naturally, following their interest and flow. There were no planned or predetermined activities, rather a variety of materials and games were displayed, which the children could explore at their will. Apart from the materials, the children came up
with many activities of their own, using the inside and outside spaces according to personal interest. Evergreen Explorations offer the opportunity for the children to self-direct and flow with their individual rhythms and interests. There is a lot of space for vital expression and for interpersonal dynamics and relationships to be expressed and explored. When we were permitted to return to the TLC’s Base Camp in November, we decided to keep one morning a week for the free exploration in Evergreen, as we had seen the benefit derived from these mornings and the importance of the experiences that evolved.

ii) Base Camp mornings

We started to use Base Camp after lockdown restrictions lifted, to work with the older children in small groups, to bring presence to our campus after the long absence, and also to use the computers in the Magazine Headquarters, for the children to finish the next issue of their magazine project. The campus needed a lot of maintenance work, cleaning, unpacking and fixing. The children were also involved with this, putting much time and energy to recreate and repurpose the spaces that have been empty for the past year.

In November, when schools were allowed to open again, we worked to bring all the children together, and find our individual and collective rhythm after the time apart. For the younger children foundation skills in language and mathematics, as well as project work on the Great Story of the Universe, article writing and work in the math lab were the focus of four mornings a week for all the children.

There was great joy to be together in the campus again, and the children chose games that could involve everyone of all ages during their after lunch play time.

After two months the lockdown resumed and Base Camp activities needed to end. When the campus had to close, older children in small groups continued mornings of math exploration, arts and crafts, writing, basketball, badminton in Gaia community, while younger children went to work in Evergreen and Anitya communities.
iii) Creative movement

The Creative Movement sessions were specifically aimed to work with group dynamics and emotion expression. This year, with changes in groups, spaces and gaps in between due to constantly altered restrictions for Covid, it was challenging to settle the children each time to be able to work deeper. So, going with the flow of things, many sessions were adapted to working with transition, with what the children were dealing with in their current reality. We learnt together and had a lot of fun.

iv) Physical Activities

The children's individual physical activity schedules continued as best as they could, in this year of varying lockdown restrictions. Individual sports training like horse riding could continue but team sports like football could not always happen. Swimming is a skill that we encourage all the children in TLC to master. With pools being closed, or operating under restrictions, we have explored other possible avenues. During the monsoon when the ponds in Auroville were full, we went in small groups to swim, accompanied by a swimming teacher. When the waters receded in the ponds, we
attempted to take the smallest children to the small pool at the Botanical Gardens. That worked until the weather became too cold. Later, when restrictions eased, our older children could go again to La Piscine, and classes resumed, but for the younger kids we had to find a small pool elsewhere. Our swim instructors have charmingly adapted to the situations and have been encouragingly available to continue to teach the children swimming whenever and wherever possible, showing much commitment and adaptability.

v) Seeds of Nature

This year, we continued to explore Nature through the project "The Seeds of Nature". During the lockdown periods we used the Anitya Community space in small groups and in the period of November and December we returned to the Base Camp. The main activity is that of the vegetable garden through which with children we learn the rhythms of Nature, the seasons, patience and the many secrets of plants. Through direct observation and the method of spontaneous questions guided by curiosity and interest, we went to explore in the field. Through free observation we get to know the botany of plants, their names and their uses, both medicinal and nutritional. The direct contact and experience in the garden leads the children to have more responsibility towards the environment and more care of every form of life. Satisfaction and gratitude at the time of harvesting a fruit or vegetable is the most beautiful moment to live, which makes us happy and consolidates the feeling of feeling part of the whole and co-participants in the cycle of life.

vi) Theatre
One of the highlights and main focuses of the year was on theatre. Most of our children participated in a large-scale theatre performance created and directed by Johnny and Jesse. This project elicited much learning in the children. For many it was the first time that they had appeared in front of an audience and they were faced with managing their self-consciousness and overcoming shyness, working on the quality of Courage. Group work and collaboration plays a huge part in such processes; children need to practice patience, and accommodate the needs of others in the group processes. Mental capacities are worked on through memorizing scripts, songs, movements etc. Creativity and personal expression are given space through prop and set design, costumes etc. The project was hugely inspiring and rewarding for all children and adults involved and was beautifully received by the Auroville community. Immediately afterwards, some of the older children plunged into yet another theatre project, working towards a play which was to be performed at the Christmas fair at YC. The children wrote the script themselves, created the characters, designed costumes and sets and the process culminated in a wonderful performance at the YC community event. In addition, our younger children participated in a one-day theatre workshop with a visiting volunteer who worked with them on theatre games, collaborative exercises and self-expression.
This year, during the lockdown period, we once again had the opportunity to use the Humanscapes hall once a week. We have been able to store most of our mathematical materials there, to use for these math explorations. Most of the material that we are using is Montessori-based material, which gives the child his/her own individual mathematical experience. These materials allow the children to create a concrete knowledge of the often abstract concepts in maths. Sometimes the session would start with a group presentation, while sometimes the presentations are given to only one child at the time. This will enable the child to have all the time s/he needs to explore new mathematical concepts, without feeling any pressure and without creating any sense of competition with the rest of the group.

From November, as we were again allowed to use base camp, we integrated maths into the daily routine of the kids.

viii) Fertile mornings

Our older children spent 2 mornings a week working at Fertile community with Johnny and Omid. They are currently focussing on creating a set of wooden hand-crafted boxes which they will use to fundraise towards an aspired trip to the Summer Hill festival on Self-Directed learning which will take place in the UK in August 2022. In addition, other children are working in Fertile on individually inspired projects with the assistance and facilitation of Johnny and Omid.
viii) Canva – graphic design

*Canva* is an online, free graphic design platform and publishing tool which empowers children to explore design. As a basic version of Photoshop, Canva doesn't require extensive photo editing knowledge, but allows the children to make posters, invitations, flyers, business cards...etc. The children started by creating models, adapting to multiple constraints (type of font, number of images...) to gradually become familiar with the tool, master it, and be able to start creating free models. Also, from an individual work, during the first sessions, they started to work more and more in a cooperative way on the joint creation of models. To do this, the children had to learn to listen to each other's points of view in order to tune their aesthetic sensibility and come up with a collective design. In some cases, *Canva* and Philosophy have merged in a multi-disciplinary way, *Canva* as a graphic design medium became a learning environment for Philosophy.

x) Philosophy

In teaching philosophy to children, a reflective approach to certain texts is promoted in order to launch a properly philosophical effort. The conversations that follow the reading are thus guided through questions and according to specific needs. This work is based on a research on the conditions that allow children of different ages to enter the field of philosophizing. *The Mother* wrote in 1972 a list of 12 Virtues: Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Kindness, Generosity, Equality, Peace. Each of these twelve concepts has its own evolution in the moral theory’s history and each of them is part of the history of philosophical ideas and ethical theories.

In order for the children to be able to grasp these concepts in a singular way, they have studied them as philosophical notions. The goal is to let each child appropriate each of these qualities in a new and personal way, enriched by a work of contextualisation and critical reflection. We have worked through a “3+1 programme” : each value is explored in its social and individual dimensions during three sessions. Then the forth session is held at the petal room of the Matrimandir corresponding to the quality which has been studied. This session allows the children to let the concepts infuse and the mind to calm in a bath of silence. We start from the "local", the resources of Auroville, the petals of the Matrimandir, to reflect in a more "global" way and return at the end of this journey to where we started from, but rich in our exploration and reflection.
7. Outcomes:

Both children and adults have benefited in many ways from the lockdown that has occurred this year. It has given time and opportunity to think out of the box, be creative, and to take even more charge each of his/her learning journey. We moved out into the community in small groups, which gave freshness, and also different days in different places offered a variation and sense of community.

Our children were easily able to adapt and take initiative, as our pedagogy builds on self-drive and adaptability. We could see that in a new real life situation our methodology proved itself to be very effective, and children were not so dependent on “school” for their learning”.

As many families in Auroville were struggling with their children at home, we were able to integrate several non-TLC kids during the lockdown. This was a lovely opportunity for inclusion, as children are often separated in our Auroville schools when they have their regular schedules. This was appreciated by both children and parents.

We also began working with a few younger children who were not able to attend their kindergarten programs due to lockdown restrictions. This was a wonderful experience for the whole of TLC as we have held clear the belief that this work in Integral Education should start long before children start “school” at age 6, when patterns and learning systems have already been imposed or set in. We aim and dream to work with children from a much younger age, and this period gave us the opportunity to experience the benefits derived for all in having younger children in our midst.

8. Research highlights:
Research has always been at the heart of the work in TLC, and as a result each year has brought with it new explorations, new questions and deeper experimentation. We strive to better understand our work, to more actively question it, reflect on it, and also deepen our understanding of what Integral Education is, not just in theory but in practice. This aspiration has led to an in-depth research spanning two years, involving children, parents, facilitators. The results of this research were deepened practices, many profound conversations and reflections on education, two university research theses, a full length research documentary premiering at the Auroville Film Festival (which already has been invited to be screened at other international film festivals) as well as a research exhibition at Centre d’art in March to share our journey with the Auroville community.

9. Reflections:

TLC is not a school, yet we are categorised / seen as such by many.

TLC was created as a vehicle for adult growth- to use the children’s education as an opportunity for deep introspection, reflection, unlearning and relearning. To try to become free enough to enable the emergence of something new in the field of education. We are not here to perpetuate the old and outdated.

We have done a deep research study to better understand our challenges, to gain clarity, and to understand and motivate our needs to take the next small steps forward in the journey towards implementing Integral Education. Many years ago we realized that we need to start working with parents as early as possible in their parenting journey, before they fall in to patterns of past conditioning and fears that are later hard to shift. We need parents fully on board and in alignment to be able to experiment with a new education.
We have been expressing this deep need since 5 years - that we would like to start working with parents during their first year of parenting however this proposal was rejected by School Board and SAIIER.

This year we have experienced more understanding from schoolboard, supporting our needs and recognizing our differences in approach as a learning community, not a school. The request to welcome younger children and their families was forwarded to SAIIER board, who has now given us the green light to continue our work with the families who are interested to join our nursery project.

10. Conclusion:
In the coming year we aim to deepen the work of Integral Education through our pedagogical projects – defining the projects more thoroughly and involving the children fully in the entire process, from start to finish, thereby developing and fine-tuning the interdisciplinary and hands-on/real life implementation.

We aim to encourage the “less-is-more” approach – with fewer areas of focus, in order to go deeper into the interdisciplinary projects and foster more depth, continuity and understanding of each project.

We aim to place more focus on campus development and the field of aesthetic beauty of our surroundings, developing food gardens, creating more flow between the different work spaces, and possibly working on a new construction project in base camp.

Co-education of TLC adults has always been and will continue to be a focal point of our work; working on communication skills to improve community interconnectedness; the toddler group which works with parents to encourage early implementation of the TLC values and the Integral Education approach; regular meetings, sharings, events to keep ourselves learning, sharing, thinking, re-considering and always changing and growing in our inner and outer states of being.

The farm/kitchen project will be continued and deepened as we continue to create connections from farm to plate, and use our food as an integral part of our learning journey.