

Last School

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LIVING SOULS

DEEPTI TEWARI



Through years of experimenting with different forms, there has been one common seeking which has united the diversity of individual approaches within the team of Last School.

This has been the search for conditions that would bring forward the true individuality, the soul or psychic personality, to assume its role of unifying and organizing the psychological nature.

It has necessitated that the school be structured around a highly individualized model, – one that has demanded a sort of alert, listening stillness, vigilant for signs of such an emergence, – rather than a single, fixed and imposed pattern or programme.



The Tapasya of Beauty

Yet, there have been key elements, the pursuit of Beauty, for instance.

It is no coincidence that in 1971, when Last School, the first Auroville school started in Aspiration, The Mother gave the following message:

IN THE
PHYSICAL THE
DIVINE
MANIFESTS AS
BEAUTY.

“TO BE PRACTICAL, YOU MUST FIRST HAVE A VERY CLEAR VISION OF YOUR GOAL, OF WHERE YOU ARE GOING. ...

BUT THERE IS A LONG WAY TO GO BETWEEN WHAT WE ARE AND WHAT MUST BE. AND FOR THAT WE MUST BE VERY FLEXIBLE, NEVER LOSING SIGHT OF THE GOAL, BUT KNOWING THAT WE CANNOT REACH IT AT ONE BOUND AND THAT WE MUST FIND THE WAY. ...

THAT IS HOW ONE SHOULD COME, EAGER TO FIND OUT AT EVERY MINUTE THE PROGRESS TO BE MADE. TO HAVE A LIFE THAT WANTS TO GROW AND PERFECT ITSELF, THAT IS WHAT THE COLLECTIVE IDEAL OF AUROVILLE SHOULD BE:

“A LIFE THAT WANTS TO GROW AND PERFECT ITSELF”,

AND ABOVE ALL, NOT IN THE SAME WAY FOR EVERYONE—EACH ONE IN HIS OWN WAY.”



RASA AND DHARMA

The awakening of the aesthetic being leavened by the ethical is an essential basis on which to build the powers of reason; a reason that seeks to reach beyond itself towards the harmony of a supra-rational beauty and good.

The All-Beautiful

To perceive in the world of forms an expression of the All Beautiful can be a formative experience, shaping the truth of being. This idea-force has remained a fulcrum upon which to orient contents and methodologies.

Another core idea has been that the mind must be refined to meet complexity: whether this is attempted by encouraging a variety of languages; or in the exploration of significant periods in humanity's social, cultural and civilizational growth; or, through a deep understanding of mathematical laws and the rigorousness of an awakened scientific temper.

All these fields of knowledge have been seen as important signposts guiding the journey of discovery; each subject domain an essential element in developing a complex individual being, capable of a vast synthetic thought.

Sri Aurobindo observes:

VISION IS THE CHARACTERISTIC POWER OF THE POET, AS IS DISCRIMINATIVE THOUGHT THE ESSENTIAL GIFT OF THE PHILOSOPHER AND ANALYTIC OBSERVATION THE NATURAL GENIUS OF THE SCIENTIST.

The power of envisioning, the gift of discriminative thought and the capacity for analytical observation are crucial faculties, each an aspect of the mental nature representing a particular but significant side of the being.

Each can be awakened best by a specific type of mental activity, and none deserves to be neglected in a growth that aims at a greater wholeness.



The Hero-Quest

A conscious accent on the 'hero - quest' to power an awakened will-force and a sense of service and self-giving in the life-spirit have also constituted essential elements.

The necessity of training the body in balance, plasticity and endurance whether through participation in team sports or physical culture, dance or martial arts has been greatly encouraged.

Group expeditions, local or farther afield, as for instance, treks to the Himalayas, have been perceived as vital occasions for individual and collective self-finding – 'schools' to build will and character.



Awakening the Dynamic Will-force

An education oriented towards *AN INCREASING PERFECTIBILITY* must build upon the foundation of an awakened body and a life spirit capable of the discipline that can lead to self-mastery.

Youth should have a firm grasp of the material field while being capable of lofty flight.

A conscious awareness and plasticity in the body, a wide openness in the life-spirit and as few artificial mental constructions in the mind will create the type that is available to the future.

The core of this experiment and experience is as large as life itself.

The aim is to bring forth a rich, complex and integrated personality rather than one with a set of specialized competences; a personality for whom progress implies always a widening and deepening of activities and of the faculties involved.

The human being needs this enlargement and sense of uplifting to meet the demands of the future. It is also the movement required by life in an aspiring collective.

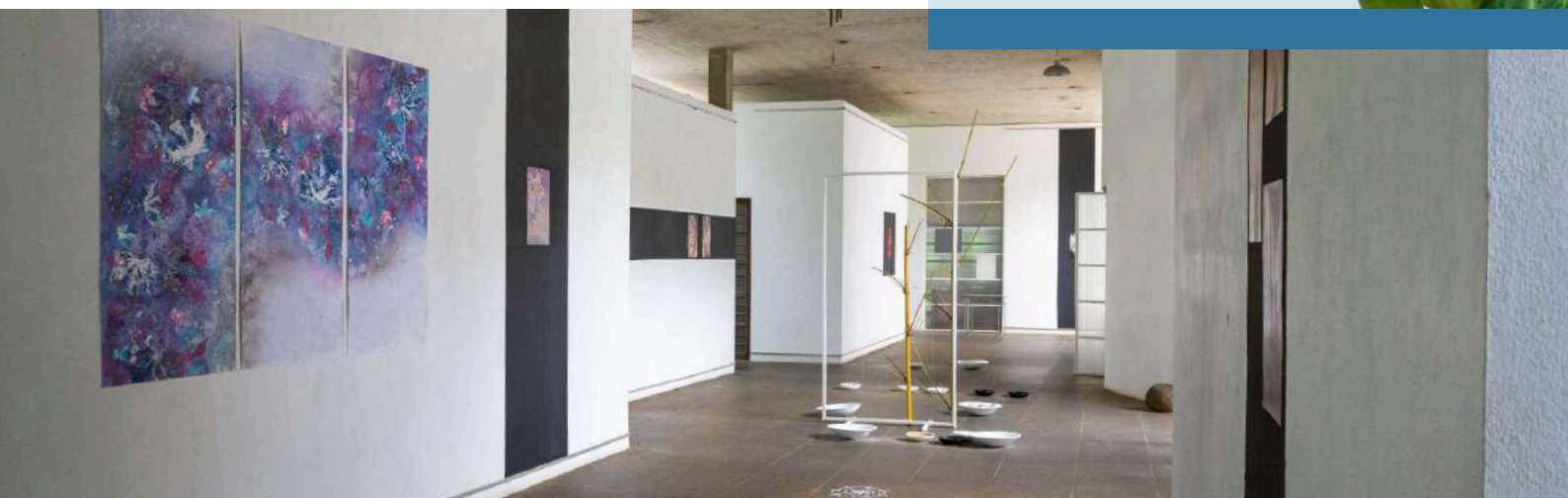
This élan of discovery, asking for a progressive mastery of many fields, has a natural tendency, once enkindled, to spread out from the school environment into other aspects of the city-in-making.

Yet, if true, there would be nothing artificially constructed, it would be the movement of a life growing and perfecting itself, a thing so natural as to be unnoticeable.

Finally, if this progression can be achieved, one may arrive at

“AN UNENDING
EDUCATION, A
CONSTANT
PROGRESS AND
A YOUTH THAT
NEVER AGES,

which is the call of
Auroville's Charter.



LAST SCHOOL WORKSHOPS



FOR ALL PROBLEMS OF
EXISTENCE ARE
ESSENTIALLY PROBLEMS
OF HARMONY.



SEEING THROUGH COMPOSITION

IN CONVERSATION WITH SHONA

I intended a workshop on composition in art—simple classical composition: diagonal, triangular, rule of thirds, the golden mean, L composition. Where do you place what in the frame?

Why composition?

It leads the viewer's eye to what you are intending to show. I felt many students were working spontaneously, without thinking about placement. This was about giving them a toolbox—ways to look at their subject and choose what they are trying to say, whether in drawing, painting, or photography.

I chose to work small, so they could explore more, almost like a series. And I kept it black and white, so the focus remained on line and composition, not color. Lola shared references on composition, and I made some samples beforehand to understand the material and possible challenges.

For preparation, we began with the idea of creating one large still life, which became two, from which everyone could draw and apply composition.

What surprised me most was the individuality. I expected some similarity, but each work was completely different. Everyone took the same inputs and created something unique—their own “handwriting.”

That was really striking.



“TRUE ART MEANS THE EXPRESSION OF BEAUTY IN THE MATERIAL WORLD. IN A WORLD WHOLLY CONVERTED, THAT IS TO SAY, EXPRESSING INTEGRALLY THE DIVINE REALITY, ART MUST SERVE AS THE REVEALER AND TEACHER OF THIS DIVINE BEAUTY IN LIFE.”

Going forward

Going forward, I see the need for more variation in the rhythm of the week.

There were moments when energy dropped, and others where concentration was very strong.

I need to find ways to support those quieter moments.

What really stayed with me was how everyone worked. There was a steady, sincere effort throughout.

That was quite incredible to witness.





WALKING BETWEEN TABLES

DUNYA GRISHINA

I think I've helped prepare things beforehand multiple times, but this was my first time actually helping people while they were drawing. It's a lot of walking between tables, looking at what people are doing, and reading whether they want help or not. Having done it once before helped — knowing when to insert myself, or when to just leave a person alone.

When I go up to someone, the first thing I see is the composition — what's working, what's standing out, what might be missing. That part comes quite naturally after spending years around art. But then there's also the human side of it. I can't just go up to someone and say something isn't working. You have to talk with them, understand why they made certain choices.

Sometimes it makes sense once they explain it, and then you just leave it.

What stood out most for me was working with ink. I usually avoid it because it's quite unforgiving, and I don't like making mistakes. I tend to gravitate towards things where I can control the outcome more. But during the workshop, I really tried to push myself, and at some point it stopped being about pushing. I actually wanted to work with ink, which was quite surprising.

I really enjoyed helping out. I also realised that, for me, Art Week is something I still want to experience — just sitting and working, fully in it.

I like being in that space where I can help when needed, and the time offered to stay with my own process.



BUT IF WE TAKE A MORE DELIBERATE VIEW OF THE WORLD'S WORKINGS, THAT DIRECT OPPOSITION APPEARS RATHER AS PART OF NATURE'S PROFOUNDEST METHOD AND THE SEAL OF HER COMPLETEST SANCTION.



“ALL'S MIRACLE HERE AND CAN BY MIRACLE CHANGE.”

STUDENTS' WORDS

There was a warm sense of familiarity when I walked into the school after the term break. I smiled to know that I was back again where the youngest student, the oldest teacher, and everyone in between, all went through the same journey to reach the same destination. This, for me, defines Last School.

ISHA MEENAKSHI



Diversity and Simplicity

It's always impressive when the organizers manage to come up with something completely different than all the things we did before.

On the first piece of the art week I found myself wildly out of my depth, overcomplicating things for myself and generally just getting in my own way. I decided to approach the second piece from the opposite direction, trying my best to go for simplicity.

ATISHA SEKAR

Two major lessons this week

One: I tend to attach my self-almost-worth with a painting I am doing. I attach my self-worth and how I see myself to the things I do or achieve. And if these things don't go well or meet my expectations I get lost in self doubt.

Two: on comparison and insignificance. I want to be able to look at different paintings and be able to see the beauty in both without comparing.

SARA BARDE

On Pressure and Intensity

And because we all went through this workshop with less stress than the workshops before, it made me wonder if stress and pressure was necessary to create that intensity.

And I think it is not.

EILEEN CANOT-PEYRACHE



TOWARDS

INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

THROUGH THE COLLECTIVE

IN CONVERSATION WITH ASHWIN EZHUMALAI

As individuals, we have to progress. But as individuals, we are always part of a larger collective. Doing activities that involve the collective really brings forward that aspect of working together. We look at how each one fits into that larger collective space, and how each one takes up a role.

The challenge and the strength

If you ask me why working in a group matters—individually, you can be strong in certain areas, but you may not cover everything.

In a collective, someone else brings what you don't have. It becomes easier to move forward. We are social beings, and we get things done better in a collective. At the same time, a collective can become chaotic. There can be misunderstandings, disagreements, things going wrong. That is where we try to prepare, even in small ways.

The way I see it is this: when you enter a collective activity, there is a framework. You make an effort to align with that. If not, it simply doesn't work.

The framework is not a rigid set of rules—it is there to help the collective function.

For example, if one person comes on time and others don't, it affects everyone. So there has to be a basic respect for that shared space. As an individual, you grow in your own way, but in a collective, you also respect the common rhythm.

When that framework is respected, you can go beyond it. It is just a starting point. The collective then becomes much richer. The framework itself evolves as the collective grows—it is not fixed.

At the end of the day, it is constant progress. We are always learning from each other, and the same is true for the collective. When new people come in and others move on, things shift. New elements are brought in, and those with experience share what works and what doesn't.

And it is always important to try new things. If you don't try, you don't know what the outcome will be.



A sense of responsibility

The environment is very nice. I think it's the intention of the school — to give a full education, an integral education.

But because there is so much freedom to do what you want, I think responsibility becomes weak.

It becomes very easy to take decisions that go against responsibility — like not coming to school because you don't feel like it.

That's something I found, and I think it's very important.

ONE DOES
NOT LIVE IN
AUROVILLE TO BE
COMFORTABLE
BUT TO GROW IN
CONSCIOUSNESS
AND TO SERVE
THE DIVINE.

Q: Do you think responsibility and initiative should come from the students themselves?

Yes. It is always different for each person, but in general, it's very easy to say, "I don't feel like it." But you should come — not because someone orders you, but because you know you should.

If you don't grow that inner will, you won't become the owner of yourself.

Every part of you will say different things, but there must be something inside that says:

"This is what I feel, but it's not what I should do."

That is responsibility. Even if you don't feel like it, you question yourself and still choose to do what is right.

And that grows over time — it becomes easier.

On the path

In Last School, I think it's the way of education, the closest to Mother's education, what she want.

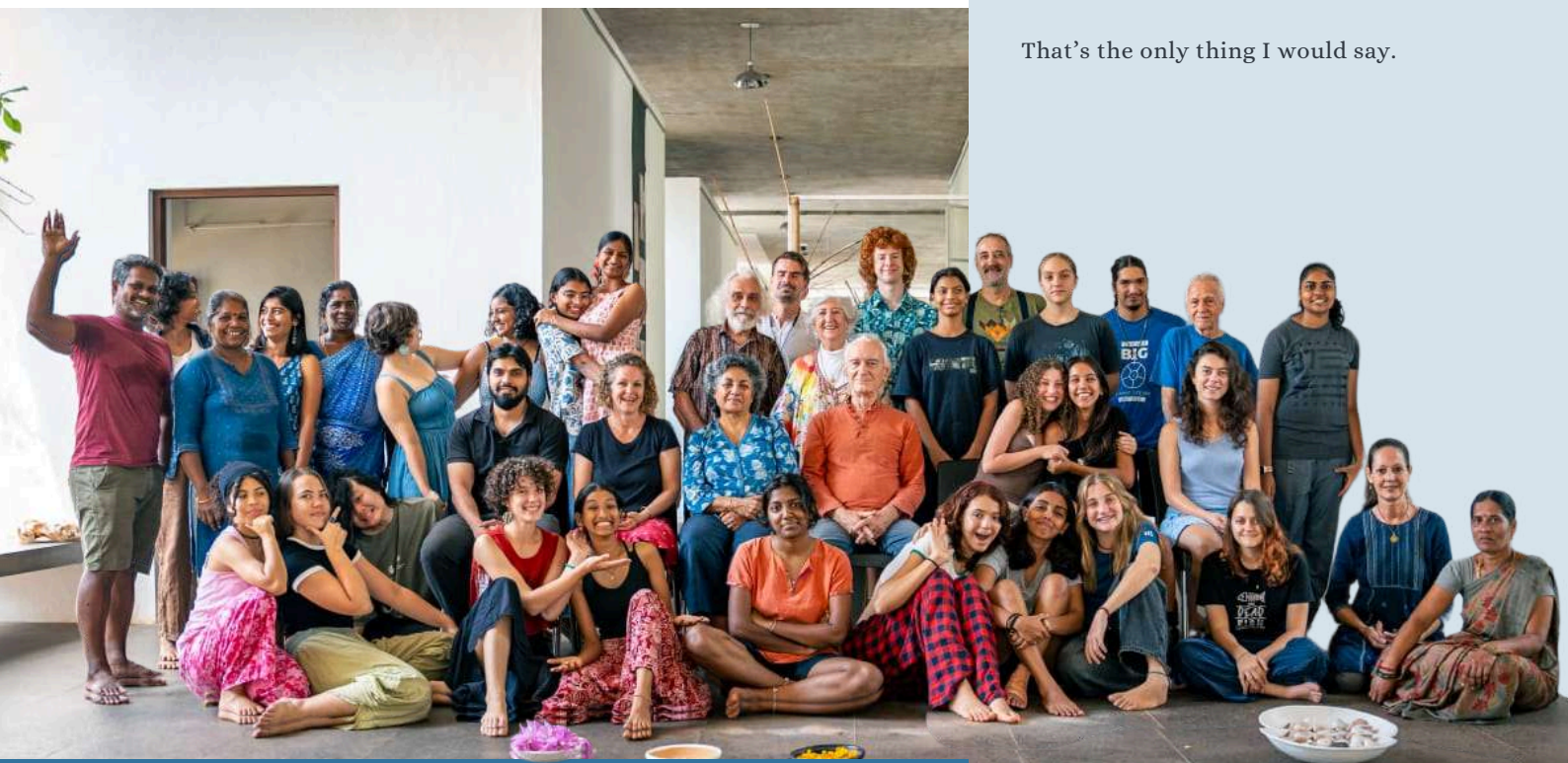
Q: Do you think Last School is doing enough in that direction?

Not enough. Because we are afraid of becoming like a religion. But it is not like that. The deeper idea is evolution — moving toward a new consciousness.

Mother spoke about this. She wanted to build this city with that force. If you are open, you receive it. But you also have to give something in return.

We have everything here. We just have to use it. You can't keep making excuses. When you point fingers at others, three fingers point back at you. So first, look at yourself.

That's the only thing I would say.





QUESTION OF EVALUATION

AUREVAN

Acquiring a formal recognition for an Auroville education has long been a topic of conversation.

Towards the future

Though this may be an interesting first step in perhaps aiding to remove part of the concern many parents seem to have in relation to preparing their children for the world as it currently is, — this initiative does not respond to the problematic so present in today's world: our current means of measuring, assessing & evaluating students do not reflect the qualities or skills needed for a rapidly changing world.

If we are attempting to shift from a system of instruction to a process of conscious exploration, integral development, guided by a sense of meaning and purpose, ease and cheerful — what have we learnt?

What are the concrete propositions we can make in Auroville, for India and the world in terms of evaluating the qualities, capacities the youth of tomorrow seek to develop?

These are the questions that led to the formulation of the Triple Challenge Framework.

FOR
MILLENNIA,
WE HAVE
DEVELOPED
OUTER MEANS,
OUTER
INSTRUMENTS,
OUTER
TECHNIQUES
OF LIVING —
AND FINALLY
THOSE MEANS
AND
TECHNIQUES
ARE CRUSHING
US.”





THE SIGN OF THE NEW HUMANITY IS A REVERSAL OF PERSPECTIVE, AND THE UNDERSTANDING THAT INNER KNOWLEDGE AND INNER TECHNIQUE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD AND MASTER IT WITHOUT CRUSHING IT.



THE TRIPLE CHALLENGE FRAMEWORK

The proposition stands thus: during the course of their secondary education a student may take up and face a total of 9 self-chosen challenges: three in the physical domain, three in the vital and three in the mental field.

Through this we aim at self-knowledge – Who am I? What do I wish to grow into? – self-determination & enthusiasm in the face of challenges.

This initiative becomes interesting as the psychological preparation for it would need to be taken up from the very youngest ages: the encouragement to make choices, to face difficulties, to discover the sense of joy in progress, to trust that inner guide.

The current exploration

This is being formally tried out in Last School this year with a group of students are 13-19yrs who have taken it up. A case study is being currently conducted to see how for find forms, for something which has been the very fabric and heart of the school informally for decades.



AUROVILLE IS THE PLACE WHERE THIS NEW WAY OF LIFE IS BEING WORKED OUT, IT IS A CENTRE OF ACCELERATED EVOLUTION WHERE MAN MUST BEGIN TO CHANGE HIS WORLD THROUGH THE POWER OF THE INNER SPIRIT



AND SO IT BEGINS

PROGRESS:

TO BE READY, AT
EVERY MINUTE, TO
GIVE UP ALL ONE IS
AND ALL ONE HAS IN
ORDER TO ADVANCE ON
THE WAY.”



CAPTURING THE CHALLENGE

ISHA MEENAKSHI

Alternative education is often faced with the question: If not grades and numbers, then what else?

A different question

We live in a world where if a certain study or achievement is not in numbers —not measurable or comparable to others in a similar area— it is not valued.

There is an incredible amount of learning that happens in Auroville, but barely any of it is put on paper.

This leads to things being unstructured and up in the air.

I see the Triple Challenge Framework as a way to bring structure and validity to education in Auroville.





PROGRESS:
THE REASON WHY
WE ARE ON EARTH.



JOYOUS ENTHUSIASM:
THE BEST WAY OF
FACING LIFE.

TRUE ENTHUSIASM IS
FULL OF A PEACEFUL
ENDURANCE.

OUR COURAGE AND
ENDURANCE MUST BE
AS GREAT AS OUR
HOPE AND OUR HOPE
HAS NO LIMITS.”

The attitude has changed

Through the Triple Challenge Framework, my attitude towards the word “challenge” has turned positive and I take it as an opportunity to progress and grow as a person. It has also made me feel more confident in my ability to face and overcome the challenges that life throws my way.

With every challenge, I experienced that the body truly is capable of more than what the mind perceives to be a limit.

SIMRAN SHAH



A STEP

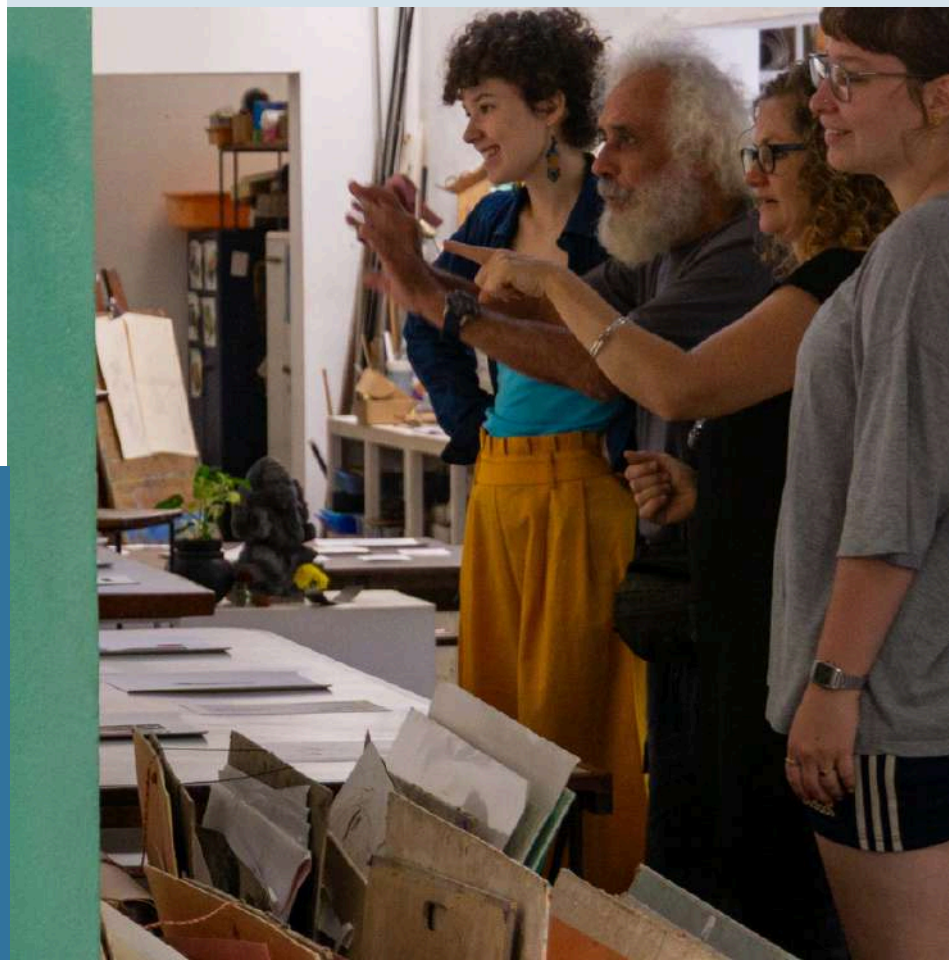
Starting the Triple Challenge Framework has given me the motivation to pursue goals I've been wanting to achieve.

I was initially drawn to it because the idea behind it really intrigued me, I've always felt that alternative forms of education should be more widely recognised, and I believe that the Triple Challenge Framework is a step in the right direction.

I am thoroughly enjoying the process, and the challenges I have chosen.

The first is interning/working to get more comfortable in new environments, and the other focused on teaching younger students, which has been a truly rewarding, and learning experience.

**NITIMEY
CANDERLE
WEIHRAUCH**



*PROGRESS: TO BE READY,
AT EVERY MINUTE, TO
GIVE UP ALL ONE IS AND
ALL ONE HAS IN ORDER
TO ADVANCE ON THE
WAY.*



Last School

A UNIT OF SAIER, AUROVILLE

Last School in Auroville, India, works primarily with teenagers. Its educational approach, anchored in Sri Aurobindo, is centered on an integral development through the method of Free Progress.

The school offers an environment of beauty, where students asking their own questions, approach learning outside the constraints of traditional academic programs or external standards. Thus stepping firmly away from formal diplomas, Last School seeks to develop individuals who are better equipped to address tomorrow's complex challenges, invent new solutions, and contribute to an evolving society, rather than simply integrating into the existing one.

Last School
After School २:०१
Super School
No School



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PHOTOGRAPHY: ASHWIN EZHUMALAI

“IN THE PHYSICAL THE DIVINE MANIFESTS AS BEAUTY”
Mother's message to Last School in 1971