In the year 2019–20 three new programs were carried out at Udavi school. Vidhya, our English teacher conducted concentration exercises for 7th to 9th graders. She also created a program for enhancing logical thinking abilities for the 9th grade. Mrinalini carried out an intensive program of creative movement for 4th to 6th graders. Their reports follow:

**CONCENTRATION EXERCISE**

“Whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of everything, the capacity of concentrating the attention.” - Mother

Mother has given a simple exercise to practice concentration. The following is an excerpt from her dialogue with a devotee in which she explains the exercise:

“Take a rose and put it in an ordinary bottle on a table. Just make sure that the rose is at your eye level. Now sit quietly and fix your attention on the rose. Each time your attention wavers from the rose, try and bring it back to the rose in total concentration. Practice this for five minutes daily. After regular and constant practice, you will notice that you are able to develop total concentration and this total concentration fills your being with silence.” - Mother

The school introduced this exercise to grade 7, 8 and 9 students, where the first 5 minutes of my classes would be dedicated to practicing this exercise. Thanks to Ecoservice, we received 21, blue-coloured, translucent, beautiful glass bottles. It was not possible to get rose flowers as prescribed by Mother on a daily basis. So, I decided to collect whatever flowers were available at the school campus. Thanks to the many varieties of flowering plants at Udavi - frangipani, yellow allamanda, bougainvillea, white periwinkle, peacock flower - I never ran short of them. To maintain uniformity, I usually collect only one type of flower for a day. Collecting the flowers in the morning is a special experience for me. It is my meditation time. After collecting the flowers, I arrange them in the blue bottles and keep them ready for the children. Sometimes the children take turns to arrange the flowers and place the bottles on the students’ tables. When everyone is settled, we start practicing the concentration exercise.

Before commencing this programme, I explained to the children the benefits of concentration:

1. Increased attention span
2. Better memory power
3. Better regulation of thoughts
4. Better observation
5. Improved will power
6. A child transforming into an “Ideal Child” of Mother.

I gave them five sets of simple guidelines to do this exercise:

1. Sit straight with shoulders relaxed.
2. Look at the flower in front of you on the table. Look at it in a normal manner, which means don’t stare at it and don’t strain your eyes; of course, you can blink.
3. Notice the thoughts that come in and go out of your mind while concentrating on the flower. When you think of something else, come back to the flower.
4. It is okay to break your concentration exercise in between if you feel like. Look away for a few seconds and try to come back to the flower.
5. Don’t do it if you are tired, unwell or if you don’t feel like doing it for whatever reason (I try to get the reason later).

The children were very eager to practice concentration for two reasons:

1. It was proposed by Mother
2. They wanted to perform well in their studies

We started our first session with one minute of concentration and gradually increased it to five minutes over a span of a month and half. They had difficulty in doing it at the beginning. They became restless, distracted, absent-minded, at times even dozed off (they still do). I reiterated the guidelines whenever necessary. I spoke to them and helped them with their difficulties or doubts they had while doing it. With time, the children gradually picked up the knack and art of concentrating. The physical ability to sit in a calm and composed manner for three to five minutes, at this age, is an achievement in itself. Concentration requires ‘sustained’ physical and mental energy and that is where the challenge lies. If outer composure could be mastered, inner composure could be mastered too with practice and patience. It is because of children’s sheer perseverance and faith that they are able to learn and practice this great art.

After practicing concentration for three months, I asked grade 8 and 9 students to write their experiences. What I read is priceless. Here is an assortment of experiences from different students, taken verbatim, from their feedback:

“_I can hear my heart beat when I concentrate the flower only_; “_Before I struggle to do this exercise but now it is easier than last time_; “_When the concentration is done, I close my eyes with my hands for a few seconds. Then I will feel as fresh as I have taken a hot bath_; “_It is nice to watch a flower, sometimes I observe clearly like veins, how many petals, colours_; “_I feel little sleepy_; “_When I do concentration I see two faces clearly my father and mother_; “_I count..._
the petals”; “Sometimes I am angry that time my concentration gone”; “Everyday new flower will be there, colourful flower. I see only the colour”.

Do I see the expected benefits of this exercise in these children? Yes, as promising sparks. The children are taking baby steps but sure steps. Watching them concentrate on the flowers is a sight to behold - little Buddhas radiating light. For now, they may not understand the full significance of this exercise. But in the future, I trust this practice will intuitively guide them to wade through the challenges of their lives and help them blossom into wonderful people. That is when their ability to concentrate becomes second nature.

**PROGRAMME ON DEVELOPMENT OF LOGICAL REASONING**

“The instrument of the educationist is the mind...”
- Sri Aurobindo

Man’s mind is the result of his brain’s activity. Logical thinking is one of the primary aspects of the mind. In simple definition, Logic means the study of the principles of reasoning. It is one of the oldest academic subjects, Aristotle being the first logician. Logical thinking is an essential tool in the acquisition of knowledge. The brain, like any other muscle in the body, can be strengthened with exercises. There are exercises meant for making the brain and mind focused and sharp. These exercises improve the memory, speed, accuracy and discerning ability of the mind, which in effect improve logical thinking.

Following the implementation of Mother’s Concentration exercise, we introduced a programme on logical reasoning. It is based on Sri Aurobindo’s “The Training of the Logical Faculty.” He expounded that observation, comparison, memory and judgment were the main faculties of logical reasoning, and a training on it needed to focus on developing these faculties I implemented this programme in grade 9 during the third term of the academic year. We selected relevant exercises from books on development of logical reasoning.

The first exercise was on the topic of analogy. By studying analogy, students develop the faculties of comparison and correlation. The first set of exercises was as simple as: If Earth is related to planet, what is moon related to? Or,

Earth : planet : Moon : ?

answer choices: (1) star, (2) planet, (3) galaxy, (4) satellite

The idea was to make the students understand the relationship between two objects, how they fit together and compare the relationship to another set of objects. This way they learnt the meaning of the word ‘analogy,’ which means ‘correspondence’. We solved more complex problems in analogy. Students were given separate worksheets to solve them and the answers were discussed. The students explained the reasons for their answers. This practice helped them to objectively look at their own mental processes and also articulate them.

After analogy, we worked on the topic of series completion. It involves comparison and pattern recognition. Identifying regularly repeated arrangement of details is called pattern recognition. The exercises in this topic were non-verbal. The problem questions and answer choices were sets of diagrams. The question had a series of five diagrams and the student had to find the 6th diagram or event of the series from a range of answer choices.

I was curious to see the response from the students as they were new to abstract concepts. To my pleasant surprise, they were able to solve the non-verbal exercises in no time. Of course, a few of them needed help, but the majority was able to comprehend the concept quickly.

To make the training more challenging, I asked them to create their own sets of problems and solutions. They were ready with their exercises in a week. We had an informal presentation where each student drew his or her question figures on the blackboard and the rest of us solved it. Some of the questions lacked the necessary details or were inconsistent in data. The students identified the errors and helped the presenters correct their questions. It was deep learning from each other. It was fun.

At the end of every logical reasoning class, students played educational games such as chess, scrabble, shapes, balance and Jenga blocks. We celebrated the success of this programme with a trip to ice cream parlor at the Visitors’ Centre.

Is a logical mind sufficient for one’s progress in life? According to Sri Aurobindo, logic “is much more a guardian against error than a discoverer of truth...” So, clearly logical reasoning has its limitations. It cannot lead us to truth, but it can help us find what is not the truth. Its main purpose is to identify and separate error from fact. This power alone makes it a valuable, protective tool for a growing child against ignorance and falsehood.
CREATIVE MOVEMENT
SESSIONS AT UDAVI

PURPOSE
During the last few months of the previous academic year (2018-19), observations of the needs of the children at Udavi was done through pilot sessions, interactions with children, teachers and management staff. Based on which it was decided to work mainly with the three classes of the primary school to
▶ enhance their ability to handle their emotions
▶ find ways to help each other and work with each other
▶ to draw from inner reserves of self awareness
▶ improve skills to aid academic abilities eg. attention

PLAN
To conduct regular weekly sessions for the different groups of children using the physical body in playful movement activities to access and work with their emotional selves, intellectual and other aspects of themselves.

To record their progression in written and photo forms.

METHOD
Theme - Emotion expression
Working with movement in creative ways to call attention to the many different emotions one can feel. Finding right channels for expression. Showing how wrong ways of expressing or holding affects in adverse manner.

Thread 1 - Group dynamics
Strengthening group bonds so the class cares and supports each other.

Activities that highlight cooperation, that allows for learning to work with persons of different abilities in different situations.

Knowing how to help and when to ask for help.

Eg. Building things together. Using their bodies to collectively make a bridge, car that moves etc. Using material found on the ground, making a house with different rules each time.

Thread 2 - Concentration
Spotlight on the importance of paying attention to the task at hand. On handling distractions. The direct effect of focus on quality of result.

Eg. Small groups standing in small circles balance a leaf on the shoulder (keep changing the body part on which they balance for varying levels of difficulty and fun) while passing a stone around with their feet.

Thread 3 - Senses
Exploring nature around - leaves, sticks, flowers, bugs - to assimilate how we sense the world around through our senses.

Leading to how we understand people around and situations around, through our senses.

The possibilities of different perspectives.

Eg. Using newspaper sheets to recreate the quality of water as it is represented for them.

Thread 4 - Self Awareness
Inner reflections on what affects one, how our actions affect others. Learning to see, hear the voice within. Need for self discipline to come from within.

Seeing how conditions and constraints are present in every situation. Finding many ways to navigate.

Eg. Using tiles on the floor, if indoors or with shapes drawn with chalk on floor, if outdoors, varying constraints are placed on their movement. They have to find creative solutions to move across.

For instance, only one can occupy a tile at a time. On rectangles only one foot and one other body part an touch the floor. At every rectangle you come to you cannot repeat the body parts you have used before, and so forth.

OBSERVATIONS OF PROGRESSION
1. Channeling emotions and expressing them in a non harmful way
   Eg. When taunted etc, children who earlier might retort in an angry manner, found ways to ignore or answer calmly
2. Creative solutions to a problem
3. Better able to work with others, even with children they don't usually get along with
4. Could stay focused longer periods of time on a single activity

FUTURE PLANS
The behavioural changes exhibited has been so heartening, that plans were made to expand the scope. At the teachers general meeting a creative movement session was conducted to heighten their awareness. Of their behaviour, conditioning and motivations in the teacher role.

Alongwith having fun it made us think about our actions.

Plans have been made to conduct regular sessions for the teachers of the kindergarten and early classes in the coming academic year.

Parents are also to be roped in with sessions for them once a term.

The hope is to induce the growth of self awareness in
the child from an early stage by working on his self and to change the attitude of the adults who influence his environment.

Every two years the school prepares and puts up a program of physical demonstration. This year the whole school—from kindergarten up to 10th grade prepared different items which were presented to a large audience of parents and students of other schools. Dr. Mrs. Oza, Member Governing Board member was also present on the occasion.

At Udavi school we also invite visiting artists show their skills to our children. This year we had two mask makers from Italy who visited the school, four professional clowns from France who entertained the children immensely and some puppet artists who taught our children puppetry.
Physical Demonstration w/ Kindergarten Udavi School

Puppet workshop at Udavi School

“Clowns across borders” at Udavi School

Physical Demonstration – Parimary School

Mask makers with Udavi students

“Clowns across borders” at Udavi School