Teachers

To love to learn is the most precious gift that one can make to a child, to learn always and everywhere.

* It is an invaluable possession for every living being to have learnt to know himself and to master himself. To know oneself means to know the motives of one’s actions and reactions, the why and the how of all that happens in oneself. To master oneself means to do what one has decided to do, to do nothing but that, not to listen to or follow impulses, desires or fancies.

To give a moral law to a child is evidently not an ideal thing; but it is very difficult to do without it. The child can be taught, as he grows up, the relativity of all moral and social laws so that he may find in himself a higher and truer law. But here one must proceed with circumspection and insist on the difficulty of discovering that true law. The majority of those who reject human laws and proclaim their liberty and their decision to “live their own life” do so only in obedience to the most ordinary vital movements which they disguise and try to justify, if not to their own eyes, at least to the eyes of others. They give a kick to morality, simply because it is a hindrance to the satisfaction of their instincts.

No one has a right to sit in judgment over moral and social laws, unless he has taken his seat above them; one cannot abandon them, unless one replaces them by something superior, which is not so easy.

In any case, the finest present one can give to a child would be to teach him to know himself and to master himself.

* July 1930

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PERSONALITY TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL TEACHER

1. Complete self-control not only to the extent of not showing any anger, but remaining absolutely quiet and undisturbed under all circumstances.

2. In the matter of self-confidence, must also have a sense of the relativity of his importance.

Above all, must have the knowledge that the teacher himself must always progress if he wants his students to progress, must not remain satisfied either with what he is or with what he knows.

3. Must not have any sense of essential superiority over his students nor preference or attachment whatsoever for one or another.

4. Must know that all are equal spiritually and instead of mere tolerance must have a global comprehension or understanding.

5. “The business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material.” (Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*)

Published in June 1954

Never forget that to be a good teacher one has to abolish in oneself all egoism.  

10 December 1959

1 These comments were written by the Mother after she was shown a questionnaire on the subject which had been submitted to the Centre of Education by a training college for teachers.

2 Message for the Annual Meeting of Teachers.
On Education

And to be worthy of teaching according to the supramental truth given us by Sri Aurobindo there should no longer be any ego.3

December 1960

All studies, or in any case the greater part of studies consists in learning about the past, in the hope that it will give you a better understanding of the present. But if you want to avoid the danger that the students may cling to the past and refuse to look to the future, you must take great care to explain to them that the purpose of everything that happened in the past was to prepare what is taking place now, and that everything that is taking place now is nothing but a preparation for the road towards the future, which is truly the most important thing for which we must prepare.

It is by cultivating intuition that one prepares to live for the future.

18 September 1967

Think rather of the future than of the past.3

15 December 1972

TEACHING

The school should be an opportunity for progress for the teacher as well as for the student. Each one should have the freedom to develop freely.

A method is never so well applied as when one has discovered it oneself. Otherwise it is as boring for the teacher as for the student.

3 Message for the Annual Meeting of Teachers.
There is one thing that I must emphasise. Don’t try to follow what is done in the universities outside. Don’t try to pump into the students mere data and information. Don’t give them so much work that they may not get time for anything else. You are not in a great hurry to catch a train. Let the students understand what they learn. Let them assimilate it. Finishing the course should not be your goal. You should make the programme in such a way that the students may get time to attend the subjects they want to learn. They should have sufficient time for their physical exercises. I don’t want them to be very good students, yet pale, thin, anaemic. Perhaps you will say that in this way they will not have sufficient time for their studies, but that can be made up by expanding the course over a longer period. Instead of finishing a course in four years, you can take six years. Rather it would be better for them; they will be able to assimilate more of the atmosphere here and their progress will not be just in one direction at the cost of everything else. It will be an all-round progress in all directions.§

10 September 1953

To avoid giving too much work to the students of the Higher Course, but without lowering the general standard, the ones who feel that they have too much to do could be invited to give up a few courses. They would then be able to concentrate their time and energy on those they wish to keep. This would be better than lightening the courses, which would as a result lose their value for the other students. It is only natural that besides gifted students who have no difficulty in following, we should have less gifted students who cannot follow at the same pace. The latter could set aside certain subjects and take them up later by doing an extra year. Is this a good solution?
On Education

That depends. It cannot be made the general rule; for many of them it would not be much use. They have not reached a stage where they would be able to concentrate more on certain subjects if they had fewer subjects to study. The only result would be to encourage them to slacken — the very opposite of concentration! — and it would lead to a waste of time.

The solution does not lie there. What you should do is to teach the children to take interest in what they are doing — that is not the same thing as interesting the students! You must arouse in them the desire for knowledge, for progress. One can take an interest in anything — in sweeping a room, for example — if one does it with concentration, in order to gain an experience, to make a progress, to become more conscious. I often say this to the students who complain of having a bad teacher. Even if they don’t like the teacher, even if he tells them useless things or if he is not up to the mark, they can always derive some benefit from their period of class, learn something of great interest and progress in consciousness.

Most teachers want to have good students: students who are studious and attentive, who understand and know many things, who can answer well — good students. This spoils everything. The students begin to consult books, to study, to learn. Then they rely only on books, on what others say or write, and they lose contact with the superconscient part which receives knowledge by intuition. This contact often exists in a small child but it is lost in the course of his education.

For the students to be able to progress in the right direction, it is obvious that the teachers should have understood this and changed their old way of seeing and teaching. Without that, my work is at a standstill. §

16 December 1959

(There was disagreement among the teachers about whether the study of English literature should be made

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compulsory or optional for literature students of the Higher Course. When the matter was referred to the Mother for decision, she replied:

To the teachers:

It is not so much the details of organisation as the attitude that must change.

It seems that unless the teachers themselves get above the usual intellectual level, it will be difficult for them to fulfil their duty and accomplish their task.

10 August 1960

It is not through uniformity that you obtain unity.

It is not through uniformity of programmes and methods that you will obtain the unity of education.

Unity is obtained through a constant reference, silent or expressed, as the case demands, to the central ideal, the central force or light, the purpose and the goal of our education.

The true, the supreme Unity expresses itself in diversity. It is mental logic that demands sameness. In practice, each one must find and apply his own method, that which he understands and feels. It is only in this way that education can be effective.

13 October 1960

Mother, would you please define in a few words what you mean essentially by “free progress”?

A progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas.

(Several teachers submitted a report which expressed concern about the irregular study and class attendance of
On Education

the students. In the opinion of the teachers, only a few students were doing satisfactory work. As a solution, they suggested a more strict organisation of classes. The Mother commented:

First for the teachers:
I am satisfied with the figures indicated in the report. In spite of what one might think, the proportion of very good students is satisfactory. If out of 150 students, there are 7 individuals of genuine value, it is very good.

Now for the organisation:
The classes as a whole may be reorganised so as to fulfil the needs of the majority, that is to say, of those who, in the absence of any outside pressure or imposed discipline, work badly and make no progress.

But it is essential that the present system of education in the new classes should be maintained, in order to allow outstanding individuals to show themselves and develop freely. That is our true aim. It should be known — we should not hesitate to proclaim it — that the whole purpose of our school is to discover and encourage those in whom the need for progress has become conscious enough to direct their lives. It ought to be a privilege to be admitted to these Free Progress classes.

At regular intervals (every month, for example) a selection should be made and those who cannot take advantage of this special education should be sent back into the normal stream.

The criticisms made in the report apply to the teachers as much as to the students. For students of high capacity, one teacher well versed in his subject is enough — even a good textbook, together with encyclopedias and dictionaries would be enough. But as one goes down the scale and the capacity of the student becomes lower, the teacher must have higher and higher capacities: discipline, self-control, consecration, psychological understanding, infectious enthusiasm, to awaken in the student
Centre of Education

the part which is asleep the will to know, the need for progress, self-control, etc.

Just as we organise the school in such a way as to be able to discover and help outstanding students, in the same way, the responsibility for classes should be given to outstanding teachers.

So I ask each teacher to consider his work in the school as the best and quickest way of doing his Yoga. Moreover, every difficulty and every difficult student should be an opportunity for him to find a divine solution to the problem.

5 August 1963

Mother, my students tell me that Z has told them that latent faculties could be developed by methodical exercises and that You had indicated these exercises to him. He added that we should experiment with this here in our Centre of Education.

On Z’s insistence, I had indicated a first exercise — but the results were rather unfortunate, and I had to stop.

When the time has come, these things come naturally, spontaneously, so to say, and it is better not to make any arbitrary resolutions.

The education we are given here at present differs little from the education that is given elsewhere. This is precisely why we should try here to educate the latent and spiritual faculties of the student. But how can we do this in school?

This cannot be done by any external method. It depends almost entirely on the teacher’s attitude and consciousness. If he does not have the vision and the inner knowledge himself, how can he transmit them to his students?
On Education

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

20 April 1966

To the teachers and students:

The “Vers la Perfection” classes are in accord with the teaching of Sri Aurobindo.

They lead towards the realisation of the Truth.

Those who do not understand that are turning their backs on the future.

September 1966

(A teacher complained that trivial and useless things were being taught — that, for example, in the language classes students were asked to read foolish stories and given insignificant details about the life and customs of the people.)

Your difficulty comes from the fact that you have still the old belief that in life some things are high and others low. It is not exact. It is not the things or the activities that are high or low, it is the consciousness of the doer which is true or false.

If you unite your consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness and manifest It, all you think, feel or do becomes luminous and true. It is not the subject of the teaching which is to be changed, it is the consciousness with which you teach that must be enlightened.

31 July 1967

4 The name given by the Mother to a group of classes based on the Free Progress System.
I don’t even know whether I have a soul, but as a teacher
I am expected to help the students and “insist on the
growth of the soul” — some light please.

The contradiction comes from the fact that you want to “men-
talise” and this is impossible. It is an attitude, an inside attitude
mostly but which governs the outside action as much as possible.
It is something to be *lived* much more than to be taught.

* *

*If we are to have a new system, what exactly will this
system be?*

It will be put into practice in the best way possible, according to
the capacity of each teacher.

25 July 1967

* *

(A teacher suggested reorganising the curriculum of the
students of a certain age-group. He advised reducing
the number of scheduled classes; teachers would give
individual assistance to their students in the mornings
and meet them as a class only in the afternoons. His
letter ended:)

Many teachers feel that the division between X’s
classes and what is called the “Old System” is not desir-
able. With the reorganisation we suggest, the differences
between the two will be greatly diminished. Do you
think that this division should continue? Must we go
on waiting for it to disappear?

It would be infinitely preferable that the division should dis-
appear immediately. The effectiveness of what you suggest will
become apparent only in practice. Therefore it seems to me that
the best thing is to try, either for a full year if the results are slow
On Education

to show themselves, or for three months if the results are clearly apparent by then.

With sincerity and flexibility you should be able to solve the problem.

6 November 1967

A meeting of the teachers of the Higher Course was held on the 9th of November 1967 in order to discuss suggestions for possible changes in the Higher Course.

A proposal was made that the Higher Course may be reorganised as follows:

1. The choice of a subject for study should be freely made by each student, and it should reflect a real and serious quest of the student;

2. Each topic thus selected would constitute a short or a long project, according to the nature of the topic;

3. In exploring each project, students would take the help of the teacher or teachers that they might choose from among the teachers competent to deal with it;

4. There will be no fixed oral classes; but teachers may by agreement with their students arrange for oral classes as and when necessary, preferably in the afternoons;

5. The exact quantum of work to be covered by each student for his selected course cannot be determined, but in order to have completed his Course, he should have shown regularity of sustained effort, development of capacities, understanding of his subjects and the power of answering relevant questions orally and in writing with sufficient clarity and precision. The quality of the work will be more important than the quantity of the

5 Here are listed only five of the fourteen proposals upon which the Mother’s reply is based.
work, although the latter too should not be meagre, but commensurate with our high standards.

The above proposal was met with a general approval with some exceptions and it was decided to refer it to the Mother to seek Her guidance with regard to it.

It is all right. Now the important point is to apply it with sincerity and thoroughness.

Blessings.

November 1967

X said that we should ask Mother if the project method, under which each student will be asked to select one or a few topics for intensive study and exploration, should not be accompanied by a more comprehensive study intended to impart to the students a wider understanding of the important branches of knowledge.

School is just a preparation to make the students capable of thinking, studying, progressing and becoming intelligent if they can — all that must be done during the entire life and not only in school.

November 1967

Up to the secondary level, it is understood that the children are too young to know about Yoga and to decide whether they want to take up Yoga or not. So the education to them is education and nothing else.

But for the Higher Course, I think, it must be made clear that only those who are here for Yoga can be admitted as members of this Course — then the education becomes Yoga.

If Mother gives Her directive on this point, it will make things very clear to many of us.
School is just a preparation to make the student capable of thinking, studying, preparing and becoming in intelligent of their case. All that must be done during the entire life and not only in school.
Centre of Education

It is not quite like that. In all the sections, Primary, Secondary and Higher Course, the children will follow yogic methods in their education and prepare and try to bring down new knowledge. So all the students can be said to be doing Yoga.

A distinction must be made, however, between those doing Yoga and the disciples. To be a disciple one has to surrender and the decision to do so must be full and spontaneous. Such decisions have to be taken individually — when the call comes — and it cannot be imposed or even suggested. §

Blessings. 6

16 November 1967

(Concerning a choice of textbooks for a mathematics class)

The French book is the only one that seems possible to me — the others are forbidding and make you disinclined to work.

But I would not advise giving this French book to the students. They do not really need books. The teacher or teachers should use the book to prepare lessons that are adapted to the knowledge, the capacity and the needs of the students. That is to say that the teachers should learn what is in the book and transcribe it and explain it to the students, bit by bit, a little at a time, with plenty of explanations, comments and practical examples so as to make the subject accessible and attractive, that is, a living application instead of dead, dry theory.

3 December 1967

Sweet Mother,

It is about a week that we started our new experiment in the Higher Course. And already a few questions

6 After reading this report of her comment, the Mother wrote “Blessings” and her signature.
On Education

have arisen with regard to which I seek Thy Light and Guidance.

The organisation and the programme of the teachers and students have been so framed as to give preeminent importance to the free growth and progress of the individual.

1. Some teachers have said that this is all right for the elite, but not for the common or average students.

But, Mother, should we not so endeavour as to gradually turn the average students into the elite? And, if so, would it not be good to so organise that the stress is laid on the training of the elite, and to allow now and then, for shorter or slightly longer periods, some concessions for the average students — but aiming always to eliminate ultimately such concessions?

We want here only children that can be considered as an elite. The organisation must be made for them. Those who cannot fit in, they have only to go after a one year trial.

2. Some teachers have said that there is a conflict between the needs of the individual's progress and those of the progress of the group of which the individual in question is a member. How to reconcile and resolve this conflict?

It has been contended that if the individual remains more or less with his group, he gets the advantage of sharing the group's experience, of group discussions and of a collective study.

All that is useless — if the individual can progress at his maximum the group will necessarily benefit by it. If the individual is submitted to the possibility and capacity of the group, he loses his chance of total progress.

22 December 1967
X asked me some time ago whether I would like to work in the Free Progress classes. At present I am teaching in classes where what is called the “old way” is used. Mother, tell me whether I should remain where I am now or whether I should work in the Free Progress classes?

The old method of teaching is obviously outdated and will be gradually abandoned throughout the whole world. But to tell the truth, each teacher, drawing his inspiration from modern ideas, should discover the method which he finds best and most suited to his nature. Only if he does not know what to do may he join his class to those of X.

Ordinary classes belong to the past and will gradually disappear. As for the choice between working alone or joining the “Vers la Perfection” classes, that depends on you. Because to teach and to conduct a class one must move away from theory and intellectual speculations to a very concrete application which has to be worked out in all its details.

Learning to teach while taking a class is certainly very good for the would-be teacher, but certainly less useful for the students.

To join “Vers la Perfection” is a kind of training which may be very useful for a beginner, who can easily learn the practical side of teaching there.

The choice is yours.
On Education

I have observed two contradictory kinds of ideas in myself: one kind in favour of individual work, another in favour of group work.

Isn’t it possible to divide the class time into two parts (equal or unequal according to the need) and to try out both systems? This would give diversity to the teaching and provide a wider field for observation of the students and their capacities.

* (Below is a summary of questions concerning two groups of classes for children of fourteen to eighteen. Though both groups were based on the Free Progress System, the programme of “En Avant” was more structured than that of “Vers la Perfection”.)

1. There are some differences of opinion among the teachers about the direction that should be taken by our school. How to do away with these differences?

2. Should there be fixed classes and a fixed programme for children below fourteen or can they also be given the freedom to choose their line of work and to work at their own pace?

3. Is it or is it not our essential task to realise the conditions in which the inner soul of the child will find it possible to come forward and guide his development?

4. Should we envisage a fusion of the two groups “Vers la Perfection” and “En Avant”?

All of them are both right and wrong at the same time.

First of all it seems that after the age of seven, those who have a living soul are so awake that they are ready to find it, if they are helped. Below seven this is exceptional.

There are great differences among our children. First there are those who have a living soul. For them there is no question. We must help them to find it.

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But there are others, the ones who are like little animals. If they are children from the outside, whose parents expect them to be taught — for them the “En Avant” classes are suitable. It is of no importance.

The problem is not whether to have classes and programmes or not. The problem is to choose the children.

Up to the age of seven, children should enjoy themselves. School should all be a game, and they learn as they play. As they play they develop a taste for learning, knowing and understanding life. The system is not very important. It is the attitude of the teacher that matters. The teacher should not be something that one endures under constraint. He should always be the friend whom you love because he helps and amuses you.

Above the age of seven, the new system can be applied to those who are ready, provided that there is a class where the others can work in the ordinary way. And for that class the teacher should be convinced that what he is doing is the right method. He should not feel that he is relegated to an inferior task.

When people do not agree, it is their pettiness, their narrowness which prevents them from doing so. They may be right in their idea... but they may not be doing the right thing, if they don’t have the necessary opening.

These things should be above considerations of personality. It is a weakness to mix the two. There should be no considerations of personality.

There are some things that we cannot do. For example, if we wanted to bring up all the children by the new method, we would have to take them all on trial for one or two months, find out those who can follow, and send the others back to their families. It is impossible.

We must therefore produce the solution within. There are children who don’t like the new method — responsibility worries them. I have received intimations of this in letters from children. We can only leave them as they are.

Everyone, without exception, without exception, should
On Education

know that he is not someone who knows and applies what he knows. Everyone is learning to be what he should be and to do what he should do.§

16 November 1968

I have read with satisfaction what you say about your work and I approve of it for your own work.

But you must understand that other teachers can conceive their own work differently and be equally right.

I am surprised at your criticism of Y, for it does not correspond to what I know of him and his attitude.

I take this opportunity to assure you that spiritual progress and the service of Truth are based on harmony and not on division and criticism.

25 November 1968

Progress lies in widening, not in restriction.

There must be a bringing together of all points of view by putting each one in its true place, not an insistence on some to the exclusion of others.

True progress lies in the widening of the spirit and the abolition of all limits.

22 October 1971

The teachers have to grow into the needed consciousness, emphasis should be on the actual experiences of work and there should be no difference in the child's mind between work and play—all should be a joy of interest. It is the teacher's job to create that interest.

If the interest is there, the right work will follow.

1 November 1971

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Centre of Education

R was absent today and I found, after the class, that he has Your permission to stop coming to my class and take woodwork instead.

He told me he liked much better to do manual work instead of studies. I thought he was right in his instinct and his choice was the best for his nature. So I gave him the permission required.

26 March 1946

You must be very careful to see that there is no overlapping in the lessons that you teach. Your subjects are related to each other. If two teachers begin to speak on the same point, naturally there will be some difference in their points of view. The same thing seen from different angles looks different. This will bring confusion in the young minds of the students and they will start comparison amongst the teachers, which is not very desirable. So each one should try to take up his own subject without wandering about in other subjects.

10 September 1953

Regarding the questions that will be put to the students, I would ask the teachers to think with ideas instead of with words.

And, a little later, when it becomes normal for them to think with ideas, I shall ask of them a greater progress, which will be the decisive progress, that is, instead of thinking with ideas, to think with experiences. When one can do that, one really begins to understand.

You have asked the teachers “to think with ideas instead of with words”. You have also said that later on you
On Education

_will ask them to think with experiences. Will you throw some light on these three ways of thinking?

Our house has a very high tower; at the very top of that tower there is a bright and bare room, the last one before we emerge into the open air, into the full light.

Sometimes, when we are at leisure to do so, we climb up to this bright room, and there, if we remain very quiet, one or more visitors call on us; some are tall, others small, some single, others in groups; all are bright and graceful.

Usually, in our joy at their arrival and in our haste to receive them well, we lose our tranquillity and come galloping down to rush into the large hall which forms the base of the tower and which is the store-room of words. Here, more or less excited, we select, reject, assemble, combine, disarrange, rearrange all the words within our reach in an attempt to transcribe this or that visitor who has come to us. But most often the picture we succeed in making of her is more like a caricature than a portrait.

And yet if we were wiser, we would remain up there at the summit of the tower, quite still, in joyful contemplation. Then, after a certain length of time, we would see the visitors themselves descending slowly, gracefully, calmly, without losing anything of their elegance or their beauty and, as they cross the store-room of words, clothing themselves effortlessly, automatically, with the words needed to make them perceptible even in the material house.

This is what I call thinking with ideas.

When this process is no longer mysterious to you, I shall explain what is meant by thinking with experiences.

31 May 1960

When you think with words, you can express what you think with those words only. To think with ideas is to be able to put the same idea in many kinds of words. The words can also
be of different languages, if you happen to know more than one language. This is the first, the most elementary thing about thinking with ideas.

When you think with experience, you go much deeper and you can express the same experience with many kinds of ideas. Then thought can take this form or that form in any language and through all of them the essential realisation will remain unchanged.

* 
To be convincing when you speak, think not in ideas but in experiences.

* 
Did you attend the teachers’ meeting with X? They were meeting because in addition to their studies they wanted to give everyone a special project. They wanted to help them to discover what the scientists are discovering at the moment — “What is water?”, “Why does sugar dissolve in water?” — and all these things that are leading scientists to the conclusion that they know nothing.

So I asked them the question: “What is death?”

It is very important. For hundreds of years men have been asking this question. They don’t know.

The students will say that they don’t know what death is, but they will find out by investigation. To understand this, you must know that (Mother makes a gesture indicating several directions), and in the end the knowledge is much wider than if one follows a straight line.

In silence, one comes into contact with the Truth. Later, the idea descends, passes through the “library” of words and picks out the most suitable ones. At first it comes hazily. You must continue until it becomes precise. You can note it down, but you should remain quiet and continue. Then you get the exact word. The word that comes then is used in its essential sense, but not in its conventional sense.
On Education

It is not quite the reality; they are the words which come closest to the reality. The teachers should do that. It would be very useful instead of (gesture of going round and round in the head).

(Silence)

I don’t know whether you have tried to get mental silence. You can spend your whole life on that and achieve almost nothing, whereas this is extremely interesting.

At first nothing happens. You must stay like that: not actively — be in an aspiration towards the Divine. There must be no movement in the mind; it is not even surrender, it is a movement of perfect... something between self-giving and self-abdication. And if the mind makes an offering of its way of being, one day the answer comes spontaneously. It falls like a light.

The calmer you are, the more confidence you have, the more attentive you are, the more clearly it comes. A time comes when one has only to do that (gesture of opening).... The student asks a question. You remain (same gesture)....

And above all, do not think actively: “I want to know... What should I say to him?” No!

Then you will always get the answer for the student. Perhaps not the answer to the question he has asked, but the answer he needs. And it will always be interesting....

Up there, one knows. When you come to believe that the mind is powerless, that it knows nothing, you fall silent. You are more and more convinced that up there, there is a consciousness that not only knows but has the power, perceives the smallest detail and consequently the student's need, and replies to that. When you are convinced of that, you give up your personal intervention and say: “Take my place.”§

31 July 1967

*
I let these three boys “drug” themselves with their games, hoping that they would grow out of it more quickly.

And in fact that is what happened at the beginning of the third week: the three children are putting their names down for individual games and forgetting their noisy games.

May I continue to do this: to let this “out of school” abscess form and then burst, not caring about the time that goes by and that seems to be wasted from the academic point of view?

Certainly, it is the best thing to do.

Within the framework of the school, should we allow “out of school” games of a certain type, such as hide-and-seek, ball-games (cricket), building a house.... Seeing the children clamouring for them, it gave us the idea that our children may have been cut off from a certain kind of activity: being able sometimes to play in complete freedom in a big park! Is this a real need in the children?

Undoubtedly.

23 September 1960

* It is very difficult to choose games which are useful and profitable for a child. It asks for much consideration and reflection, and all that one does unthinkingly can have unhappy consequences.

* If the children, even very small, are taught to put things in order, classify objects by kind, etc. etc., they like it very much and learn very well. There is a wonderful opportunity to give them good
On Education

Lessons of arrangement and tidiness, _practical, effective lessons_, not theory.

Try and I am sure the children will help you to arrange things.

Love and blessings.

14 December 1963

It has been noticed that quite a good number of students do not have the correct posture while sitting and writing. When they write they do not keep the notebook in front of them. It is kept at an angle of 45 to 90 degrees.

Perhaps it would be good for the teachers themselves to learn first the proper posture while writing?

With my blessings.

Sri Aurobindo, in one of his letters, has written about the young people and their readiness for _sadhana_. I enclose a copy of this letter for you to see. I should like to know from you if the warning given by Sri Aurobindo in this letter against enthusiastically communicating to the young people the ideas and feelings about spiritual life should be kept in mind while speaking to our students in the class? Is there a danger of “lighting an imitative and unreal fire” in them as Sri Aurobindo says here?

_Sri Aurobindo’s letter:_ “It may be said generally that to be over-anxious to pull people, especially very young people, into the _sadhana_ is not wise. The _sadhak_ who comes to this yoga must have a real call, and even with the real call the way is often difficult enough. But when one pulls people in in a spirit of enthusiastic propagandism, the danger is of lighting an imitative and unreal fire, not the true Agni, or else a short-lived fire which
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cannot last and is submerged by the uprush of the vital waves. This is especially so with young people who are plastic and easily caught hold of by ideas and communicated feelings not their own — afterwards the vital rises with its unsatisfied demands and they are swung between two contrary forces or rapidly yield to the strong pull of the ordinary life and action and satisfaction of desire which is the natural bent of adolescence. Or else the unfit adhar tends to suffer under the stress of a call for which it was not ready, or at least not yet ready. When one has the real thing in oneself, one goes through and finally takes the full way of sadhana, but it is only a minority that does so. It is better to receive only people who come of themselves and of these only those in whom the call is genuinely their own and persistent.”

This quotation is splendid and very, very useful. Certainly the warning given by Sri Aurobindo must be strictly kept in mind when speaking to the young people who are bound to change their mind easily.

In class you must remain very objective.

Blessings. 2 June 1967

I should like to know what exactly you mean by “objective” in the above answer. Do you mean that no personal feeling must be allowed to enter in thought and speech while explaining Sri Aurobindo’s and your views concerning sadhana to the students?

Yes, that.

Do not speak of yourself or your own experience. 5 June 1967

On Education

Teachers must not be absent on the days and at the times of their classes. If a person is obliged to have external activities during school-hours, he cannot be a teacher.

11 March 1970

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DISCIPLINE

Constraint is not the best or most effective principle of education. The true education should open out and reveal what is already there in these developing beings. Just as flowers open out in the sun, children open out in joy. Obviously joy does not mean weakness, disorder and confusion, — but a luminous kindliness that encourages what is good and does not severely emphasise what is bad. Grace is always closer to the truth than justice.

1961

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Mother, what should be done in a class when a child refuses to conform to a discipline? Should he be left to do as he likes?

Generally speaking, above the age of twelve all children need discipline.

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Some teachers believe that you are opposed to discipline.

For them, discipline is an arbitrary rule that they impose on the little ones, without conforming to it themselves. I am opposed to that kind of discipline.

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192
So discipline is a rule which the child should impose on himself. How can he be led to recognise the need for it? How can he be helped to follow it?

Example is the most powerful instructor. Never demand from a child an effort of discipline that you do not make yourself. Calm, equanimity, order, method, absence of useless words, ought to be constantly practised by the teacher if he wants to instil them into his pupils.

The teacher should always be punctual and come to the class a few minutes before it begins, always properly dressed. And above all, so that his students should never lie, he must never lie himself; so that his students should never lose their tempers, he should never lose his temper with them; and to have the right to say to them, “Rough play often ends in tears”, he should never raise his hand against any of them.

These are elementary and preliminary things which ought to be practised in all schools without exception. §

One can be in psychological control of the children only when one is in control of one’s own nature.

16 July 1963

First, know thoroughly what you have to teach. Try to get a good understanding of your students and their particular needs. Be very calm and very patient, never get angry; one must be master of oneself in order to be a master of others.

7 December 1964

If you have to exercise authority, have authority over yourself first. If you cannot keep discipline amongst the children, don’t beat or shout or get agitated — that is not permissible. Bring
On Education

down calm and peace from above and under their pressure things will improve.§

And what should we do for the little children, Mother?

Oh, little children are wonderful! I see a lot of little children. People have got into the habit of bringing them to me. And the consciousness that is already there in those who are less than two years old, is magnificent. They are conscious. They don’t have the means to express themselves, the words are not there, but they are very conscious. And so to scold a child, that seems...!

The other day, the day before yesterday, one was brought to me, and he was grumbling. And of course his mother... So I gave him a rose: “See! It’s for you!” Of course, he didn’t understand the words, but he turned the rose this way and that, and he calmed down. Little children are wonderful. It is quite enough to surround them with things and to let them be. Never interfere unless it is absolutely necessary. And let them be. And never scold them.§

31 July 1967

You are a good teacher but it is your way of dealing with the children that is objectionable.

The children must be educated in an atmosphere of love and gentleness.

No violence, never.
No scolding, never.
Always a gentle kindness and the teacher must be the living example of the virtues the child must acquire.

The children must be happy to go to school, happy to learn, and the teacher must be their best friend who gives them the example of the qualities they must acquire.

194
And all that depends exclusively on the teacher. What he does and how he behaves.

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_The students talk so much in the class that I have to scold them often._

It is not with severity but with _self-mastery_ that children are controlled.

* 

I must tell you that if a teacher wants to be respected, he must be _respectable_. X is not the only one to say that you use violence to make yourself obeyed; nothing is less respectable. You must first control yourself and never use brute force to impose your will.

* 

I have always thought that something in the teacher’s character was responsible for the indiscipline of his students.

_{I hope you will give me precise instructions which will help me to keep order in my classes._

The most important is to master yourself and never lose your temper. If you don’t have control over yourself, how can you expect to control others, above all, children, who feel it immediately when someone is not master of himself?
On Education

To the teachers of all the infant classes

One rule which must be rigorously applied:

It is absolutely forbidden to hit the children — all blows are forbidden, even the slightest little slap or the so-called friendly punch. To give a blow to a child because he does not obey or does not understand or because he is disturbing the others indicates a lack of self-control, and it is harmful for both teacher and student.

Disciplinary measures may be taken if necessary, but in complete calm and not because of a personal reaction.

*What can I do to achieve a silent atmosphere in the classroom?*

Be completely silent yourself.

Bring a piece of cardboard with you, about one metre long, on which you write in very big letters, black on white,

SILENCE

(much bigger than that) and as soon as the students start talking, put the cardboard in front of you.

Blessings.

*Never tell a child something it has to forget in order to truly know. Never do something in front of a child that it must not do when it is grown up.*

Never forget that a little child under six knows much more than he can express.

196
HOMEWORK

All the students complain that their teachers think only of their own classes and want to give them homework, each one thinking that he is giving very little and not understanding that all these little bits together make up a considerable amount.

I cannot say they are wrong.

All the teachers who give lessons to a certain group of students should agree among themselves to allot the work so that the students are not overworked and can enjoy a rest and a relaxation that are indispensable.

This collective preparation must be ready before I can give any useful advice.

As for the subjects, it is indispensable to choose those which coincide with their personal experience so as to encourage introspection, observation and analysis of personal impressions.

December 1959

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(A teacher of mathematics asked whether he should strictly adhere to the policy at that time, that children below the age of ten should not be given homework; a few of his students had asked for problems to do at home. The Mother wrote:)

This homework is a very thorny matter. Let those who want to do homework write to me directly about it.

1960

*
On Education

In our arithmetic class we would like to be given some homework to do.

If only you could write French a little more correctly!
You may do some homework if you really want to — but it is better to do a little well than to do much without care or concentration.
If you want to be able to do anything at all, you must learn to discipline yourselves and to concentrate.

28 June 1960

I do not agree that children should work at home. At home, they must be free to do what they wish.
The solution to the problem can be found in the silence room.8

14 September 1967

This has come up after receiving many letters from both parents and children complaining that because of homework, the children go to bed late and are very tired as they do not sleep enough.
I know that all these complaints are exaggerated, but they are also the indication that some progress must be made in the routine.
This project has to be worked out in its details with plasticity and suppleness.
I am not for treating all the children in the same way; it makes a kind of uniform level, advantageous for those that are backward but detrimental for those who can rise above the common height.

8 A room where students sit or study in silence.
Centre of Education

Those who want to work and learn must be encouraged. But the energy of those who dislike studies must be turned to another outlet.

Things are to be arranged and organised. The details of execution will be fixed later on.

Blessings.

26 September 1967

TESTS

Sometime I would like to know, Mother, Your intentions with regard to regrouping these classes in the new year, whether with an examination or without.

I consider an examination as quite necessary. In any case there will be one in French.

My love and blessings.

29 October 1946

It is not by conventional examinations that students can be selected for a class. It is only by developing in oneself the true psychological sense.

Select children who want to learn, not those who want to push themselves forward.

29 October 1965

(Concerning cheating in tests)

What should I do? Must we do what is done outside — put three teachers in a room to invigilate? The teachers do not like doing things in this way here in the Ashram.

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On Education

Or should we abolish tests? I find this proposal doubtful, since the same thing happens with homework and essays.

In any case the problem exists, and in order to find the real solution we should understand why the children behave like this.

Please tell me the cause of this misbehaviour and the solution to this problem.

It is very simple. It is because most of the children study because they are compelled to do so by their families, by custom and prevalent ideas, and not because they want to learn and know. As long as their motive for studying is not rectified, as long as they do not work because they want to know, they will find all kinds of tricks to make their work easier and to obtain results with a minimum of effort.

June 1967

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(The Mother indicated that repetition of the statement below, a hundred or a thousand times each day, until it becomes a living vibration, would help the student to instil in himself the right will and motive for studying.)

To be repeated each day by all the students:

It is not for our family, it is not to secure a good position, it is not to earn money, it is not to obtain a diploma, that we study.

We study to learn, to know, to understand the world, and for the sake of the joy that it gives us.

June 1967

*
The only solution is to annul this test and all that are to come. Keep all the papers with you in a closed bundle — as something that has not been — and continue quietly your classes.

At the end of the year you will give notes to the students, not based on written test-papers, but on their behaviour, their concentration, their regularity, their promptness to understand and their openness of intelligence.

For yourself you will take it as a discipline to rely more on inner contact, keen observation, and impartial outlook.

For the students it will be the necessity of understanding truly what they learn and not to repeat as a parrot what they have not fully understood.

And thus a true progress will have been made in the teaching.

With blessings.

21 July 1967

I find tests an obsolete and ineffective way of knowing if the students are intelligent, willing and attentive.

A silly, mechanical mind can very well answer a test if the memory is good and these are certainly not the qualities required for a man of the future.

It is by tolerance for the old habits that I consented that those who want tests can have them. But I hope that in future this concession will not be necessary.

To know if a student is good needs, if the tests are abolished, a little more inner contact and psychological knowledge for the teacher. But our teachers are expected to do Yoga, so this ought not to be difficult for them.

22 July 1967

Naturally the teacher has to test the student to know if he or she has learnt something and has made a progress. But this test
On Education

must be individual and adapted to each student, not the same mechanical test for all of them. It must be a spontaneous and unexpected test leaving no room for pretence and insincerity. Naturally also, this is much more difficult for the teacher but so much more living and interesting also.

I enjoyed your remarks about your students. They prove that you have an individual relation with them — and that is essential for good teaching.

Those who are insincere do not truly want to learn but to get good marks or compliments from the teacher — they are not interesting.

25 July 1967

What should be the criteria for giving prizes in our “Free Progress Classes”? The prizes certainly should not be based on competitive grades.

A prize of appreciation, of equivalent value, could be given to those who have exceeded a certain level of (1) capacity, plus (2) goodwill and regularity of effort.

Both should be there to warrant the prize.