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UPCOMING EVENTS

- Independence day
- Arts Day
- Project Day
- Field Trips
- iPad based learning



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Highlights

Rangachary Reports:

- Vidya Vanam has been formally recognized by National Institute of Open Schools (NIOS) to grade 8 and also the vocational stream.
- The annual day held on February 5th was a grand success with a superb dance drama presentation by the upper school.
- The first floor of the new school building is completed and is to be occupied by the senior classes for the new year
- The bharathnatyam dance workshop was held at Vidya Vanam - the first of its kind for the region with participation of children from Vidya Vanam and Coimbatore

- The new school year began with the addition of the following classes and the school strength now stands at 249.
- The computer room is now in full swing and children spend time learning the elements of computer skills. We have 10 computers with printers along with 5 over head projectors for AV needs of the school.
- Prema Rangachary was the invited speaker to the Cognizant conference on education in rural India.
- Ground was broken for the construction of a dorm room to house visiting faculty and staff.

Profile of Dejasvi— Kaveri Group Student



This year's Kaveri Group is a rowdy bunch, with 32 students in the class! One of the students that consistently stands out for his dedication and enthusiasm to his studies is Dejasvi. Dejasvi is eleven years old and has been with Vidya Vanam since its beginning, 5 years ago. During our conversation the other day, I discovered that Dejasvi has a hidden talent and passion for drawing. According to classmate, Adithyan, "Dejasvi is drawing nicely—very, very beautiful—he's a master." Dejasvi told me that during his spare time, he enjoys drawing, especially parrots—his favorite animal. Currently, Dejasvi lives in , about 3km away from Vidya Vanam. He is living with his younger brother, grandmother and great-grandfather, and often helps out with chores around the house. His great grandfather frequently spends time in the forest, collecting materials for the baskets that he weaves. Dejasvi's mother and father live further away, in the village of Sembukarai, where his father works in the forest department and his mother works in their home. Dejasvi lives in Thuvaipathy to

make his access to education at Vidya Vanam more feasible. He explained that when he is with his parents, he helps out with their three cows, including feeding them and bringing water to them. He says that his favourite parts of his experience at Vidya Vanam are the games, dancing, and writing, and that his favourite subject is science. Throughout our interview, several other boys from the Kaveri class kept chiming up to voice their descriptions and friendships with Dejasvi. He says that his closest friends at school are Ponnarasu, Madhan Kumar, Adithyan and Manoj—all of whom had nothing but great things to say about him. Among his peers in the classroom, Dejasvi stands out for his dedication to his studies. He is always one of the first to attempt a new assignment and offer support to his fellow classmates.



Dejasvi in front of his brick home in Thuvaipathy

Since my arrival, R. Chitra has stood out as one of the friendliest, caring people on the Vidya Vanam campus. Amongst the chaos of my first day, Chitra was quick to introduce herself to me, and welcome me to the teaching staff of Vidya Vanam. When I found out that I would be interviewing her for the Vidya Vanam newsletter, I was very excited to get to know more about her teaching background and interests. Chitra, fondly called “Senior Chitra” to distinguish her from the other R. Chitra on campus, is the class teacher of Neem. She explained that her interest in teaching for Vidya Vanam was grounded in Vidya Vanam’s unique characteristics and teaching methods. She says that she chose to become a teacher due to the draw of children’s curiosity and desire to learn. Chitra is currently

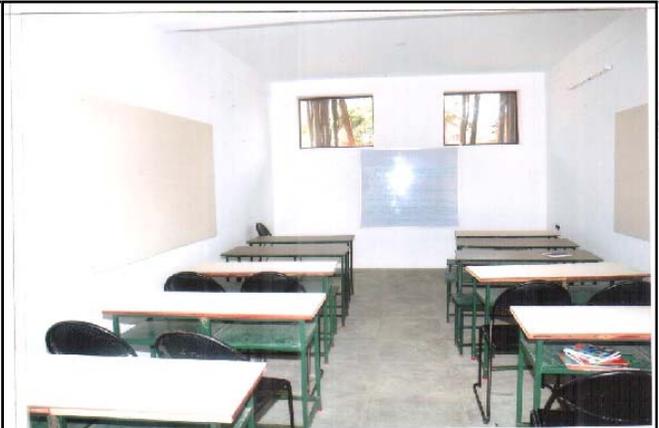


living with her husband, and two children—both of whom attend Vidya Vanam. They live together in Thekkalur, a village not too far from campus. Before moving to Thekkalur, Chitra lived in Nalasinga Sholayoor Attapadi, located in Kerala. She has three brothers and one sister, all of whom she is still able to see relatively frequently.



Chitra with her family in Thekkalur Village

Throughout our conversation, it became evident that Chitra has a passion for languages. Even as a child, Chitra’s favourite subject to learn was English—an interest that has extended into her teaching career. She enjoys teaching English songs to the Neem class, and invited me to join them one afternoon, as her students excitedly performed “Happy and You Know It.” She says that she is able to apply Vidya Vanam’s teaching methodology to the raising of her own children, Viji and Chandru. When Chitra is not teaching, or caring for children, she enjoys music, dance, and cooking. She said that she especially likes learning, watching, and practicing the tribal dances. Chitra is a very caring and passionate teacher—focusing on the development of each child in the Neem Class. I had a great time learning more about her teaching interests throughout our conversation, and feel very fortunate to get to learn from her this year.



The Northern end of the campus is the site of the new school block. Built with support of a number of well wishers, the 10 room class room will complete and fulfill the accreditation needs for the school. The class rooms are spacious each, approximately 400 sq feet and with white boards and newly ordered desks and AV material for each class room. The children are excited by the opportunity to move into the new class rooms and dreamed projects they will do when they are there.

**Vidya Vanam students receive awards of participation**

Karuna is the Bharathnatyam dance teacher for Vidya Vanam. She has been with the school for over a year and her influence in the school has been tremendous. A graduate of the Kalakshethra school of dance, Chennai, she is not only an exceptional dancer but, more importantly, a patient teacher, who knows when and how to ensure the physical and mental discipline that is central to any art form. Never to bow down to chal-

lenges she was able to get the “shy boys” of the Kaveri and “Banyan “ groups to dance toe to toe with the girls! This year Karuna approached Prema Rangachari to have Vidya Vanam be the host to a dance workshop involving students from Coimbatore and also a select group of Vidya Vanam students whose parents expressed interest in their children participating in the week long process. A total of 55 students from different regions of Coimbatore district and different backgrounds and expertise participated in a 10 day long camp. The day began early at 6.00am with yoga followed by breakfast and the morning session of dance. Following a break there were tutorials in the elements of dance, the meaning of the mudras and then more dance after lunch. There were trips to the temples to show the sculptors presenting the different hand, arm and feet positions and the close relationship between dance and the value to the society. There were trips to the Nilgiri biosphere and an introduction to botany and of course flowers. The children learned how to make flower garlands, stitch the dance costumes and become familiar with all the accoutrements needed for a dance performance. They were introduced to the myths and legends about Indian culture and how they intersect their daily lives even today. One of the students, in a letter to Karuna, said it best: "I feel that the divine spirit that is behind all these arts is one and I felt it at Vidya Vanam . You cannot say that music is an art that should be heard only at a concert, nor is dancing an art that is meant only for the stage. All these arts cannot be real unless they become part of Life." A unified and holistic approach of 'living the arts' that teachers speak of was of was experienced. It was intense, exhilarating, exhausting and in the end there were tears in the eyes of many of the children not wanting to leave their new found friends of Vidya Vanam and promising, that they will be back! We are all hoping that Karuna will keep her promise.

Vidya Vanam Children with their peers learning the art and culture of the dance of India



A collage of the different themes: rigors of dance to didactic lessons, to flowers and garland making. Left: Karuna with her staff

On account of the articles published on the school in the local newspapers, Vidya Vanam has become an attraction to visitors . Some are patrons of the school and many more are deeply dedicated citizens of Tamil Nadu who value education to the underprivileged communities. These include:

- 1) Mr.E.Balagurusamy - Member (Education) - Planning Commission, Govt of Tamilnadu and previous chancellor of Anna University. He spent an entire day in the school, participated in the class room, quizzing the kids and as he put it, became a child in the process.
- 2) Mr. Milind & Mr. Muralidharan - IIT Madras. Educators and education specialists from Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, they came to observe and assess the needs of the school and provide their input into how the strengths of the school can be best leveraged into growth.
- 3) Mr. Gopal Chakravarthy - Raj Foundation, Bangalore.
- 4) Mr. Yoganathan - Shree Saritha Jain Foundation Trust. The Saritha Jain Trust has been a great patron of Vidya Vanam and we were very happy for their visit.
- 5) Ramakrishna Group of Institutions .

We said good bye to the following teachers: Ram Subramaniam, left to do his graduate Studies in Ireland, and Manjuma sought a school closer to home. Shanthi and Papitha left moved on to other opportunities to further their careers. Nicole Fereira is pursuing her studies at Delhi University. We have not, however, lost them for ever. They keep in touch through the many social media outlets and have promised to come back .

The sad feature of the second term, is the departure of the veritable Krishnamoorthy our cook. His age and endurance to care for the increasing number of students began to bear on his health and he stepped down. He is still very much a part of the founder core of Vidya Vanam

New Teachers to Vidya Vanam

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Sarah Webb:

Social Studies, Science, English Teacher



Sarah is from the United States of America and will be teaching with

Vidya Vanam for the next year. She recently graduated from the University of Puget Sound, with a Bachelor's Degree in Political Theory. Most of Sarah's studies in university were centered on international sustainable development and conservation of the environment. Last summer, she spent time in Namibia and Botswana working on conservation projects regarding southern Africa's elephant populations. She hopes to pursue a joint graduate degree in Sustainable International Development and Gender Studies upon returning to the United States. Sarah joined Vidya Vanam due to a passion for teaching, working with children, and participating in grassroots development through education.

Pushparaj:

P.E. Teacher



Pushparaj is from Chinna-Thadagam, and joined Vidya Vanam this year as the P.E. Teacher. His favourite game is volleyball, and he looks forward to teaching the students at Vidya Vanam new sports and games throughout the course of the year. This past year,

he participated in a physical education course and received a Form 3 Certificate. Currently, Pushparaj is helping to coordinate the upcoming Sports Day,

and is hard at work teaching the students the new games and competitions.

Aiswarya:

Science Teacher

Aiswarya Gopal joined us this year as the science teacher in Vidya Vanam. She is a marine biologist, and last year she was working as a research fellow in



the Centre for Marine Living Resources and Ecology, Kochi. Aiswarya is from Palaghat, Kerala, and her main reason for joining Vidya Vanam this year was to participate in the uplift of tribal children.

Rajesh:

English Teacher

Rajesh J Barasara joined us this year to teach English at Vidya Vanam. He is from Gujarat, and his parents are farmers. Rajesh has a MA in English and a B.Ed. with a specialization in ELTC (English Language Teaching). After receiving his B.Ed. he has acquired wide and varied experience as a teacher of English, lecturer in communication skills, and teacher trainer. During his various teaching stints, he learned two lessons: education is the only medium to help the underprivileged acquire a better life and the quality of education in Indian schools needs a significant amount of work. In order to work towards these two objectives, Rajesh joined Vidya Vanam in June 2012.

For five days in the middle of Summer (April 24th-29th) the teacher's of Vidya Vanam along with visiting teachers from other regional NGO's gather to discuss and dialogue the different forms of pedagogy. Constrained by the necessity of the prescribed curriculum and texts teachers have often wished means to break out of the 'doldrums' of the school schedule. To invigorate the minds of teachers, Vidya Vanam offers ideas to challenge the teachers minds and methods through an activity based work shop. This is the third year the work shop has been offered.

On day 1, T.T. Srinath, spoke on how Drama can be used in the class room. Just as an actor has to improvise on stage, he made the teachers express their passion, optimism confidence, tolerance, bias adaptability and adventurousness by acting out as though they were on stage.

The next day belonged to Mr. Harish, whose challenge was to make the idea of computation not something to memorize but as a way of viewing things, in as much an artist will look at a landscape and look for place value, size constancy and with that intro how to make fractions, decimals an "art form".

Day 3, belonged to the duo of T. M. Krishna and Sangeetha Sivakumar. The established musicians who have given a number of workshops in the corporate world on the benefits of art in the work place, grew themselves younger and have the teachers imagine the world of sound and music through the ears and brains of a child. Using the format of a traditional Indian concert, they brought together the different nuances of swaras and how they are heard, recognized and interpreted. And more importantly, how sound has an emotive content that is central to communication.

On day 4, Mrs. Usha Ramakrishnan drove the home the point the scholastic intelligence has many facets and unfortunately we recognize and wrongly give accolades to a few facets of the art of thought and imagination. Drawing from the discovery of other educators and social scientists, she gave examples of the different aspects of intelligence: 1) Linguistic intelligence, 2) Logical – Mathematical intelligence 3) Musical intelligence 4) Kinesthetic intelligence 5) Spatial intelligence 6) Naturalist intelligence 7) Interpersonal intelligence 8) Intrapersonal intelligence. This was followed in the afternoon for puzzle solving, Sudoku, identifying different smells, sounds, ragas. Building towers, making maps which was done as a group activities.

On day 5, Dr. Neeraja Raghavan gave started the session with a game, which made the participants reflect on their childhood experiences in the science class. She made every participant write what they think "Science" meant. At the end of the session they were again made to write what "Science" meant and more importantly what it means to a child.