



FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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EDUCATION SERVING THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS?!

An interview study of the educational foundations, challenges
and opportunities in Auroville, India

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Abstract

Auroville, in India was created to become a living laboratory for a new way of living and being on Earth. In this context, education in Auroville has a specific purpose. According to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa (Aurobindo, 1977; Appendix 1), Auroville should strive to serve the purpose of the evolution of human consciousness individually and collectively, to enable children and youth growing up today to develop capacities needed to solve the wicked problems their generation are left to solve. This study aims to look at if Auroville's education serves its purpose, by understanding the foundations, challenges and opportunities of Auroville schools. Three research questions are answered through the study: 1) How do Auroville schools define Integral Education? 2) What are the challenges and opportunities for teachers/schools in Auroville? 3) Can teachers and parents become agents of transformational leadership through education? Through an interview study with teachers representing the Auroville schools, material is collected and analysed using Critical Theory and Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a theoretical framework. A literature review studying the premises needed for a new universal education and the challenges that come with manifesting change is the base for the interview questions, in three areas: Education serving the evolution of consciousness, Present realities, Towards a paradigm shift in education. Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology, the material gathered through the interviews was sorted under these areas, and further analysed into different themes: Individual consciousness, Collective consciousness, Structures/Systems/Practices, Education in Auroville today, Resistance to change, Confirming the role of education in Auroville, Transformational Leadership. These areas were then processed through Critical Theory, looked at through perspectives on: Thinking to understand and transform, Judgement/resistance in how to relate to the world, Social condition under which knowledge about itself is articulated. The results from this process are discussed, showing that there is no clear definition of what Integral Education means in the Auroville schools. Common understanding exists in relation to terminology on a more surface level, but there is a gap in a deeper understanding of the larger aims of Integral Education, of the meaning of the terminology used, as well as in how to transform it into practices. Challenges show that more collective work needs to be done to lay a foundation for a new education to form, such as work with parents and resistance to change. Opportunities come with the fact that everyone who has joined Auroville is there by choice to work towards a transformation of society. Transformational leadership requires training of teachers, and areas for such professional development were suggested, as well as areas of research to progress the work. The study showed that more connections need to be made, between teachers, schools and Auroville as a whole, but also connecting to the larger aims of Integral Education as a universal education building a global consciousness.

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Aim: To understand if Auroville Education is serving the evolution of consciousness, and identify foundations, challenges and opportunities to help further the work.

Theory: The theoretical framework is based on Critical Theory and Hermeneutic Phenomenology.

Method: The method used is a qualitative interview study with 8 teachers representing the Auroville schools.

Results: The study showed existing gaps in both the understanding of theoretical concepts of Integral Education as well as in implementation practices. The outcome is that more connections need to be made between teachers, schools and Auroville as a whole, but also connecting to the larger aims of Integral Education as a universal education building a global consciousness.

Foreword

This study was undertaken during a period of great crisis in the world, also reflecting itself in very critical times in Auroville's development. It's a time when we like never before need to learn to see things from a bird's view, to drop down, diving in to understand different aspects, perspectives and opinions, and then open our wings to the sky again to see it wider, synthesize, to understand how it is all interconnected as a whole. It's an easy time to rather choose to be a rabbit than a bird, and get lost underground in deep, dark, never-ending tunnels, with no sight of hope or light at the end... Its ultimately each one's choice to be a bird or a rabbit, and this will take humanity in very different directions. In this study I am attempting to be a bird, trying to understand Auroville from that perspective, when soaring over its beauty and its challenges.



(Photo Credits "The Drone Zone")

I would like to express my gratitude to the schools and teachers who with openness and trust allowed me insight into their reality, their struggles and aspirations. This study does not aim to pass judgement on individual schools, but to discover common realities that can show a way forward together, to identify what our education in Auroville is striving for, and to capture that which serves this purpose so that it can be shared with all. I hope that this study can help identify what can be done next, to more actively become a living laboratory for educational transformation for Auroville and for the world.

I would like to thank my children for their patience and understanding, as this study many times made me disappear down the rabbit hole... I have come out now, I promise.

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Introduction

Sri Aurobindo, a philosopher and leader in the movement for Indian independence from British rule, dedicated himself to the study the evolution of human consciousness. He saw that increasing our awareness of and action through our consciousness is the key to actively participating in speeding up human evolution towards a new way of living and being on Earth. “Consciousness is not only power of awareness of self and things, it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy, it can determine its own reactions or abstain from reactions; it can not only answer to forces, but create and put out from itself forces.” (Aurobindo, 1993, p.46). Although the realities in Sri Aurobindo’s time (1872-1950) were more around the impacts and aftermaths of colonialism, world wars, and of the increasing materialism that came with industrialism, these aspects are still very much alive as the main wicked problems the world has to face today, including their impact on the environment. As we do not yet have the capacity to understand the complexities of these problems and the solutions needed, the definitions of the problems will keep shifting depending on what angle they are addressed from. As humans we do not yet have the capacity to see and understand wicked problems in their whole . For these problems there is no definite truth that can be understood as a solution, and no previous experience to take learning from (Dillon, Stevenson & Wals, 2016). An ability of openness and receptivity to see a multitude of perspectives and layers, and to learn to synthesis these needs to be developed. We can, as now, keep looking externally for partial surface solutions to problems of humanity’s outer impacts on each other and on the Earth, but with this perspective we will keep treading the same dysfunctional path.

This research wishes to address the unavoidable truth, that we have to start to look inward at humanity itself, and work on finding the solution in changing that which is causing all the problems in our own nature through value shifts and deepened consciousness. Only then will we have a chance of opening our minds and hearts to solutions that we are presently blind to.

“In order to observe the movement of your own mind and heart, of your whole being, you must have a free mind, not a mind that agrees and disagrees, taking sides in an argument, disputing over mere words, but rather following with an intention to understand – a very difficult thing to do because most of us don’t know how to look at, or listen to, our own being any more than we know how to look at the beauty of a river or listen to the breeze among the trees” (Krishnamurti, 1999, p.23).

Auroville – a living laboratory of evolution

The global, interrelated systemic dysfunctions are born from urban environments, which today represent the main human habitats. Cities and towns are designed to sustain lifestyles of consumerism resulting in high waste emissions beyond what the planetary boundaries can hold as a socially safe and just space for humanity while not overshooting the ecological ceiling. The task of the 21-century is to provide for every human being’s needs, while safeguarding the world we live in. This will require radical changes in our human nature (Raworth, 2017; Souza, Wals & Jacobi, 2019). Today the structures and ways of living across the globe have rooted themselves in an anthropocentric, fragmented and capitalist worldview. Therefore, the city is the starting point when looking at how to change the structures and functioning that will

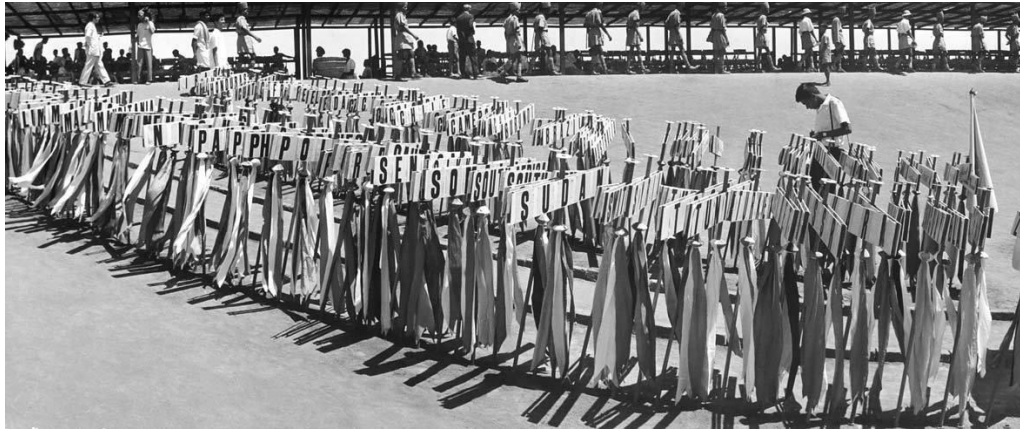
allow for peoples' thinking, behaviours and values to transform. Sprung from Sri Aurobindo's vision, Auroville was created in 1968 as an experimental township/city to be, in South India, manifested by Mirra Alfassa, the spiritual partner of Sri Aurobindo. She invited people from all the corners of the world to consciously and actively join hands to be a part of a giant experiment, to actively develop themselves and build a new kind of urban living. "Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progress above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity" (Auroville website, n.d.). The project is supported by the Indian Government and endorsed by UNESCO. Its aim is to function as a living laboratory to experiment and research a new, more conscious way of living and being on Earth (Auroville website, n.d.).

By coming together with the intention to develop individual consciousness a collective consciousness can grow, thus allowing for ways to tackle the complexities created by humankind to unfold. The collective and the individual are entwined in this journey, neither can transform without the other (Aurobindo, 1963; Souza, Wals & Jacobi, 2019). Transformative social learning can be seen to have three dimensions, the individual, collective and territorial. "The *individual dimension* refers to the subjects' roles and views within the movement. The *collective dimension* is related to forms of dialogical interaction and collective learning strategies. And finally, the *territorial dimension* brings in the space of concrete action and the social, environmental, economic, and political conditions that shape local processes" (Souza, Wals & Jacobi, 2019, p.1608). These three dimensions are visible in the Auroville context.

Today, over 50 years since its inauguration, Auroville has a population of over 3000 citizens from 58 different nations of the world. This incredible mix offers a unique opportunity to actually live and work towards human unity. Daily exposure to such diverse cultural reference points, experiences and understandings, as well as working through the challenges in communication that arise due to the many languages in use in the community, offers a unique opportunity to actually live and work towards human unity. The vision of Auroville is to extend this pilot project towards 50000 inhabitants. Here we see both the *individual and the collective dimensions* at work, both within Auroville itself, as well as in relation to the world. If nations come together in collaboration to create Auroville, their united efforts of collaboration will be founded on a deeper truth rather than rivalry and falsehood. It is important to note that it is not the finished city of Auroville that is the goal, it is the process of building it and what this can offer, that is its purpose (Hadnagy, 2012).

" I have understood that it isn't just the creation of idealism, but quite a practical phenomenon, in the hope... in the will, rather, to thwart and counterbalance the effects – the frightful effects - of the psychological error of believing that fear can save you from danger! Fear attracts the danger much more than it saves you from it. And all these countries, all these governments commit blunder upon blunder because of that fear of the catastrophe. All this is simply to tell you that if nations collaborate in the work of Auroville, even to a very modest extent, (such as this offer of money from the French government), it will do them good – it can do them good, a good that can be out of proportion to the appearance of their actions" (Hadnagy, 2012, p.179-180).

Auroville was inaugurated on February 28th, 1968, in the presence of 5000 people (Photo Auroville website, n.d.)



Youth representing 124 Nations participated in the inauguration of Auroville. (Photo Auroville website, n.d.)



So why was Auroville situated in India? To be able to be a true living laboratory, it has to include all the challenges of the world, to be able to face, work through, and the setting to overcome them brings in the *territorial perspective*. Auroville is not a theoretical experiment, but a lived experiment. “India is the representation of all human difficulties on Earth, and it is in India that there will be the... cure. And it is for that – it is FOR THAT that I was made to create Auroville” (Mother, 1964, p.41-42). To be a true experiment for humanity, there needs to be a mergence of eastern and western thought, of both spiritual and physical manifestations.

As a country dealing with the aftermaths of colonialism, India faces the same challenges with identity as so many nations. In its diversity of religions and cultures as well as the inequities of gender inequality, and of its caste system, the country brings forth a multitude of human dilemmas represented in the world. With India moving rapidly and blindly in the footsteps of the western world striving for economic growth, the gaps between rich and poor widen. Linked to this growing capitalist society comes the path of consumerism. With little understanding of the impacts on the environment in areas like waste and water management, the environmental impacts are heading for disaster. The educational system in the country has also continued to follow the model left by the British, and this combined with the massive population has created an extremely competitive environment starting from the earliest school years, resulting in huge numbers of student suicides each year due to academic expectations and pressure.

Auroville was not created to be separate from its surrounding villages and townships. It works outwards and inclusively, planting seeds of change where it can. The area where Auroville is situated belonged to the most 'backward' parts of the state of Tamil Nadu in South India. For the people living there under very poor conditions, the idea of restoring the land and building Auroville offered unexpected work for the locals in the area. Auroville also improved the standard of living through health, sanitation and educational activities. Auroville welcomes anyone wanting to join Auroville fully to be a part of the experiment and follow its charter (Appendix 2), be it from the local area or the world (Thomas & Thomas, 2013).

The land chosen to build Auroville was a barren, almost desert like plateau, deforested during colonialism for timber. Therefore, the starting point when creating Auroville was to first heal the land. Although environmental awareness was not yet a pivotal topic at the time of the creation of Auroville, and nothing was directly mentioned around this in the formulations describing the purpose of Auroville, it has a significant symbolism in how environmental consciousness has become one of the main areas of concern in globalisation in the world as well as when building the kind of city supporting a sustainable development for the future. Dr Karan Singh, who was appointed by the government of India as the chairman of Auroville said at the People's Commission on Environment and Development, India (1992):

“Now the growth of globalization has taken place, but not the development of global consciousness. Globalization is taking place as the result of science and technology, and the thrust of evolution, but global consciousness is not keeping pace with this globalization. Previously there was a longer time span between transitions. By the time they came from the apes to agriculture, thousands of years had elapsed. Then each transition took centuries. Now transition is in every generation. In five years, for all practical purpose, there is a new technological generation. So time has encapsulated, but our minds are still functioning in the old rhythms. And therefore we are in danger of getting into a situation as if somebody from the stone age were to be suddenly put down in the middle of New York City. He would not know what was happening. Not that he is unintelligent, but simply that the evolution needed to understand, appreciate and comprehend the new changes is not there” (Acharya, 2018, p.37).

Had Auroville been created in a lush vegetation, people's consciousness may not have grown to connect to the land, to the deep care that is needed for the environment, but rather taken it for granted as something that is just a part of the setting. Building a city of the future needs an understanding of sustainability that goes beyond theoretical studies, methods of construction, town planning, renewable energy water management, and transportation. Environmental consciousness to really change ways of living and being requires a connection to the heart, not just to the mind, to translate into real action. The barren land and the immense work to restore it gave a connection to people's hearts. Environmentalism becomes a lived everyday experience in Auroville through the ongoing conscious shift from land restoration, to forest preservation, and to town planning. Environmental awareness and sustainability are therefore at the core and heart of building the kind of city the future needs (Auroville website, n.d.).

Auroville at its conception (Auroville Archives)



Auroville today (Photo Credits "The Drone Zone")



What led to this study?

This study aims to bring clarity around the human challenges that come with the paradigm shift when moving away from the established mainstream educational system that we know as “school” and “education” in all parts of the world today, and instead open up the doors for a new system of education with a new purpose that is yet to be discovered. The reason for this research is the ongoing conflict between staying within the comfort-zone of what we know as education, and finding the courage to face the unknown, allowing the emergence of a paradigm shift for a sustainable and just development for people and planet.

We are so conditioned to what we know school, education and learning to be. Shaking this off and looking at the aims and practices through a new, unconditioned lens is a huge challenge, and even more difficult is allowing the time and experimentation needed to enable a new way of education to emerge.

This study is a personal journey of myself in this web, pulling between transformation and resistance to change. First as a child, then as a parent, teacher and teacher trainer. I grew up in Auroville, my children have an Auroville education, and I have worked in the field of education for 25 years, the past 10 in Auroville. I feel the potential of Auroville as a living laboratory yet I see and face the challenges every day. This makes this study an exploration to better understand my own reality and how I can better contribute towards it.

Although schools were among the first buildings built in Auroville, and education has a central place in the Auroville Charter (Appendix 2), radical steps towards transforming education in Auroville over the past 50 years are few, and not clearly visible. There is a tendency to fall back towards what we know as education through mainstream practices. New ways of education need to be defined and understood both in theory and practice. Because we cannot yet grasp in its entirety what such an education will look like, its intangibility has made it something that is also difficult to talk about, as there is no known path to trod. The result is that the topic of “how do we understand and try to implement Integral Education (the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo) in Auroville” is avoided, and we leave it at “each school is implementing it in their own way” – and we don’t speak of it more... What has brought me to this study is my need to understand what leads change in the field of education and what blocks it. What are the conditions needed that the Auroville laboratory is not yet able to provide?

The assumptions I am making as a base for this study are that leading change is not easy and requires a certain commitment and trust towards a vision of a new education and its urgency for the children of the world. The resistance to change comes from fear to give children an education with which they may not fit into the present (past) world as we know it. Our conditioning of what education should look like has set these frameworks, making changes in education and in society difficult to manifest. The multicultural context makes this all the more complex to navigate, especially when designing education for Human Unity, when this diversity serves a direct educational purpose. The framing of this study questions the reality in the field of education in the Auroville context, to better understand present circumstances that are holding back change.

Research questions

Although education has a central role in the Auroville Charter (Annex 2), the topic of education for children and youth, and the role of teachers and parents, is not enough spoken of in Auroville. To enable a collective transformation of the educational system to support the evolution of consciousness, the adults directly involved and society as a whole (Auroville) need to grow their understanding of the purpose of education in Auroville.

Most teachers in Auroville have no formal training in the field of education, and there is no system of professional development, teacher training or active educational research in place in Auroville. This study aims, through interviews with teachers representing all Auroville schools, to bring out voices that will help to understand how education is understood and practised in Auroville, and identify the gaps/challenges faced. I hope that through this study key areas can be identified and addressed in the near future so that educational research and practices in Auroville can take a leap forward.

If education has a pivotal place in Auroville, what is needed for a more active transformational educational leadership in this field? This study will address this through the following three research questions.

1. How do Auroville schools define Integral Education?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for teachers/schools in Auroville?
3. Can teachers and parents become agents of transformational leadership through education?

Structure of the thesis

To follow a clear thread through this thesis the research questions are linked to the three headings below. These headings will be used as the main headings in the Literature Review, Results Presentation, and Analysis. The headings are:

- Education serving the evolution of consciousness (Research question 1)
- Present realities (Research question 2)
- Towards a paradigm shift in education (Research question 3)

Background

Education has a key role in shaping the children growing up in this world today, to face the wicked problems that will be their reality to solve. Not working very actively to create a new way of education to “speed up” the evolution of individual and collective consciousness to enable young people growing up to find new ways to so deal with the global crisis, is letting all the children of the world down terribly. As expressed by Greta Thunberg at the *World Economic Forum* in Davos, Switzerland on January 25, 2019:

“Adults keep saying: “We owe it to the young people to give them hope.” But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.”

If the world will recognize that the ‘house is on fire’, then continuing to educate children towards the mindset that ‘lit the fire’ should be considered a terrible crime. According to studies done, a new paradigm in education is urgently needed which is based on interdisciplinary approaches, problem-based learning, imaginative tasks and communication skills (Tomkinson, 2010; Tomkinson, Engel & Tomkinson; 2011). The Living Planet Report (WWF, 2016), explains that to address the root causes of the global challenges, education needs to move towards systems thinking. Systems thinking requires thinking at different levels, and the fourth level of such thinking includes shifting our values to not just understand things but also learn to act differently (WWF, 2016). The need to re-think both the meaning of education and what learning is are evident, as we cannot solve the problems with the same mindset and values that created them. The 17 global goals that were agreed upon by 193 countries globally in 2015 indicate the need for a common direction forward (UNESCO MGIEP, 2018), yet many of these goals are set from the same capitalist mindset of continued economic growth.

Universal theory of education

The impacts of capitalism are universal, and with capitalism comes a continuous class war between those who are exploiting and those who are exploited, and with grave consequences for people and planet (Ellis, 2018; Hill, 2019; Raworth, 2017). Although policies and goals are still set based on capitalism (UNESCO MGIEP, 2018) striving for economic growth, there is strong support that problems cannot be solved withing the same mindset that created them (Aurobindo, 1993; D’Alisa, et al, 2017; Ellis, 2018; Freire, 2000; Hill, 2019; Kahn, 2010; Krishnamurti, 1999; McLaren, 2015; Peters & Wals, 2016; Raworth, 2007; White, 2007).

Wals (2016) states that if we want to really address all that which has become a manifestation of global systemic disfunction, it can only be done by addressing the root causes. He claims that what is presently happening in most schools, universities and communities is actually accelerating unsustainability and widening the gaps between inequity and inequality on globally (Peters & Wals, 2016). “Therefore, what is needed is a revolution to replace, to get rid of, the capitalist economic system with its capitalist economic relations of production and its capitalist social relations of production- the ownership by capitalists of

the wealth and the power in society” (Ellis, 2018, p.115). For a revolution to take place - through a paradigm shift, universal theory of education can no longer be formed to build and recreate a capitalist society. From the grassroots up, children need to grow through a society and an education nurturing something different, something new, that has not yet been done by humanity (Aurobindo, 1993; Freire, 2000; Jickling & Wals, 2008).

According to Uljens (2002), when looking at the possibility (or impossibility) of designing a new universal theory of education, it needs to take into account how the individual becomes a cultural subject, and how the individual can be provoked to self-reflection for independent thought in regards to culture that influences us. Auroville offers a unique multicultural melting pot. When researching a new form of education that supports the formation of individuals who together will constitute a society manifesting human unity in diversity as well as sustainable development in material aspects of life, it is important to understand what such an education requires. It needs to consider what is taught, how this is taught, and how this relates to the student.

“An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of humankind, the enhancement of his/her value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live.” (Dr Maria Montessori, source unknown)

Looking through a sociological lens, education needs to support learning that brings understanding of the world by connecting past, present and future patterns and demonstrating how these form different narratives and perspectives for different people, which in turn influences the creation of our identities as individuals. An education that actively gives the students this kind of powerful knowledge, will allow them to look at the world and understand it from many different perspectives (White, 2007). Young people growing up with an education that widens their world-views can make themselves agents of change, taking charge of their lives and becoming responsible and independent in forming their futures. Human unity requires an education where the human identity is built through an understanding of the present through its history. Through such an education children could grow up learning to think critically and build the complex understanding needed in multicultural society (Nordgren, 2017). In the context of Auroville as a centre for active research on human unity, the history of Auroville becomes of deep interest to study in order to understand its own present complexities and consciously move towards future realisations.

Education for the transformation of society

If education is a tool for transformation of society, education itself needs to represent that transformation. We are so used to the forces of social reproduction, that it becomes difficult to let go of all that we know to be education. Yet this is necessary to be able to move beyond present day realities, creating a new educational system through which the human potential is truly unlocked, enabling the creation of sustainable societies for the future (Ahmed, 2010). To raise awareness in students, it first needs to be clear that teachers themselves are agents of the mindset they want to pass on. How can this be a part of teacher training? Competencies like collaboration, systems thinking or self-awareness can only be developed through a paradigm shift, both in the role of education and in the role of the individuals within it, allowing for

new values to root themselves in its structures (McLaren, 2015, Strakova & Cimermanova, 2018; White, 2007).

It cannot be taken for granted that teachers know in themselves how to develop competencies needed for sustainable development. The competencies needed to develop skills for sustainable development need to be integrated into the whole teacher training, and not just as a single course or module within the training (Ellis, 2018; Strakova & Cimermanova, 2018). There is a gap in the abilities of universities to educate towards sustainability, and for teachers to take on this role of leadership they need both theoretical and practical experience to gain the confidence and direction that can be transferred to the work in schools. It is important that the university itself facilitates, in its teacher education, initiatives in developing knowledge and an openness towards change. By experiencing this during their studies, teacher students can feel first-hand what they later will want to transmit to their own students (Partho, 2007; Lee & Schaltegger, 2013).

Adult education plays a crucial role in leading the change, so that these kinds of experiences for teachers to be can be the first building blocks toward lifelong learning, that contributes toward more democratic, peaceful, inclusive, productive, healthy and sustainable societies. Transformation of education is not something that will happen in a few steps through policies or educational reform, but will take place gradually over time. Concepts need to be translated into implementable action, learning from that which has been achieved as well as from that which has not been achieved (Casey & Asamoah, 2016). If, as shared by Ahmed (2010), ongoing lifelong learning plays an important role in adult learning, to be able to transform the educational system and methods, they need to be addressed with continuously renewed efforts, without which change cannot slowly manifest.

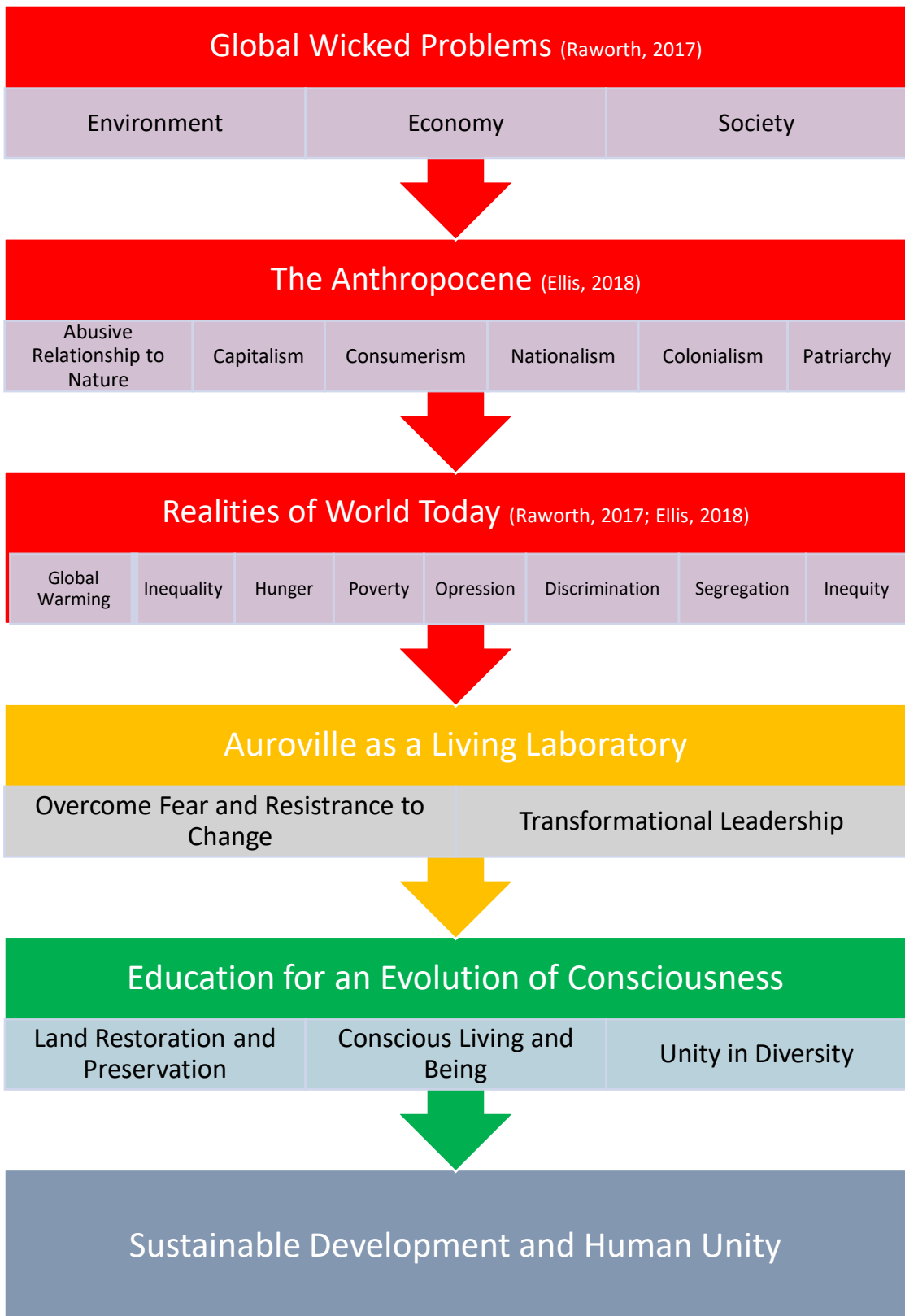
There seems to be a need in society to be in a safe middle ground between reproducing past methods and stepping into the unknown (Ahmed, 2010). Because there are these different areas of concern to take into account, transformational leadership is not an easy task and will have its shortcomings. Berkovich (2016) points out that it is easy to abandon such leadership when it meets resistance, but this cannot be avoided. With persistence and an awareness of the challenges that come with transformational leadership, it can help bring forward qualities needed for change within both organisations and society as a whole (Berkovich, 2016; Sharma, 2017). Even when people of goodwill agree on a direction to follow, it is very challenging to translate ideas into implementable action. The view of education is often idealistic, and education is seen as the tool to shape the future. Yet educational systems have not lived up to this, and instead make visible the great divides that exist in society (Ahmed, 2010). As Young (2013) writes, education is all about change, about changes in knowledge, understanding, attitudes and beliefs, as well as skills and behaviours (Young, 2013). Then transformational leadership in principle is more closely linked to pro-activity and change than what innovation on an organizational level is.

Research done by Eyal & Kark (2010) shows that in the context of schools a culture of trial and error is found, while more radical changes are rarer (Eyal & Kark, 2010). When an institution can function as a “living laboratory”, it positions sustainability both as an intentional and aspirational strategy through which learning takes place. This way change can be accelerated, and there is both a top-down and bottom-up strategy working simultaneously (Purcell, Henriksen, & Spengler, 2019). It can be

seen that, when educational change has been so linked to cultural and political shifts, different forms of resistance have emerged over time. These have come to from different concerns and are characterized by different types of behaviour. The reason for this is often that the vision is not shared, communicated properly or partnered in process (Hynds, 2010). So how do teachers whose aim is to transform education – as in the example of Auroville which is a “living laboratory”– move beyond the fear of change? What lies between the dream of changing education and through that changing the world, and the insecurities we face in ourselves, parents and in society? It is this gap of practical implementation that I want to study. The reality of those working every day with real children and parents in a society created for transformation of humanity. What are the strengths, best practices, and challenges? What is needed from educators and parents to support this transformation? As a place that is being prepared for this kind of educational research, Auroville has been given a theoretical/philosophical guideline from where to begin developing a new education, called Integral Education. Sri Aurobindo saw this new universal education transform humankind, by merging eastern and western thought, and moving away from mainstream methods of teaching a pre-decided content, to developing individual and collective consciousness (Berggreen-Clausen, 2020).



Among the first building in Auroville were the schools, which reflects the importance of education in Auroville. (Photo Auroville Archives)



Literature Review

Auroville is a living laboratory for educational research and has a specific task in spearheading a new way of education in theory and in practice. It offers a unique setting and opportunities for the necessary practical research, which elsewhere may only be studied theoretically or in a limited scope.

The literature review addresses key concepts of wicked problems of multicultural education and education for sustainable development. It also looks at change through transformative leadership in the field of education, and resistance to change among different stakeholders like teachers, parents, children and society. It aims to identify what parameters limit change, and what supports it.

The literature review forms the foundation to both build the questions for the interview study, and to further analyse and discuss the results of the interviews.

Education serving the evolution of consciousness

Globalization is a concept used when describing the phenomenon of how humanity is moving more and more toward interconnected socioeconomic and political systems, where progress is measured in economic growth. Today's world is founded on perspectives of different cultures that are fragmented, and thus society keeps reproducing this fragmentation through social segregation, nationalism, individualism, religious exclusiveness and competitive market economies. There are three pillars of sustainability: the economic, environmental and social, and of these there is often a tension between the economic and environmental aspects. Globalization is pushing the east to follow in the footsteps of the west as the example of what progress is, and "developed" countries use "developing" countries wish for this progress for their own economic gain, enforcing a system of oppressors and those oppressed. Today 10% of the Earth's population uses over 90% of its resources (Jickling & Wals, 2008). Neo-liberal trends are a social force disguised as being for the good of global cooperation, with the idea of humankind evolving towards becoming an interconnected socioeconomic system. Yet somehow the sustainability pillar representing social aspects and people's wellbeing is often not addressed in this socioeconomic system. Instead, market solutions are given to solve educational problems, and corporate agendas shape educational policies and influence international research in education. (Berglund, 2016; Freire, 2000; Jickling & Wals, 2008; Malm & Hornborg, 2014; Murray, Skene & Hayes, 2017; Raworth, 2017; White, 2007;).

There is a shift in awareness and a movement of change spreading globally, showing the need to move from today's mainstream *transmissive education* towards *transformative education*. In transformative education knowledge and understanding are co-constructed and new learning happens when previous knowledge meets new diverging cultural perspectives. Such an education offers space for autonomy and self-determination. Knowledge is not fixed and cut up and served in pieces, but co-created by students who can become critically aware and engaged in environmental and social issues and actively participate in decision making processes. This enables young people to develop the ability to critique and transcend social norms, patterns of behaviours and lifestyles through their own choices and experiences (Jickling & Wals, 2008).

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Shaull, 1970, p.15).

Integral Education

Sri Aurobindonian thought bases itself on human evolution towards global unity. It addresses the link between human and social evolution, by understanding our evolution on Earth. Sri Aurobindo asserts evolution has resulted in four different realms, each one portraying its own reality. The material realm, which is the physical reality on Earth, the life realm which is the biological reality, the intellectual realm which is the psyche-social reality, and last the metaphysical realm, which is the reality relating to a higher consciousness and to spirituality. Because of evolution, the human species cannot be the endpoint. He believed that within these realms, the (psyche) mind could evolve through progressive degrees of consciousness, each one more elevated than the one before. Once transformed to the highest level of psyche, the human species would evolve into a new breed of life, with the ability to observe an absolute reality. This reality would only become visible once the human being developed a consciousness needed to see life for its full, beyond self-driven and ego-driven individualism. This will enable individuals to construct a new social reality of collective global unity. By individuals becoming more and more aware of themselves, this will expand into a collective and global evolution on both individual and social levels (Aurobindo, 1977; White, 2007). Such a consciousness will be reflected both in individual’s actions for a sustainable development, as well as from the cultural subject’s contribution to realise human unity.

Sri Aurobindo’s vision of globalization is neither eastern nor western in its perspective, but humanistic and universal. It offers humanity an integral spiritual ideal, that harmonises existing clashes by rising above the materialist of the west and the ascetic of the east, through a radical change in human nature (Aurobindo & Mother, 1995). A new agenda for a global education based on Sri Aurobindo’s vision would provide young people growing up with values needed to perceive a futuristic and visionary understanding of globalization needed to work toward realising sustainable development and human unity. He called it an Integral Education.

White (2007, p.126-127) summarizes the framework for a new global education agenda, based on Sri Aurobindo’s ideas:

- “Perhaps the most significant educational value of Aurobindonian thought is the idea that humankind must become educated regarding the actual possibility of globalization as a positive evolutionary movement. Aurobindo argued that contemporary political ideologies are insufficient to create a real sense of Ultimacy. Nationalism is an archaic idea exhausted of relevance to promote human solidarity and global-unity. Thus, what is required is a new sense of personal self-actualization and social identity within a global context.
- If humankind is to survive current international conflicts, then a radical transformation of human consciousness must first occur to reconstruct society as a new cooperative global social order.

- Humankind as a species is still in evolutionary movement, and our current state of existence is only a transitory one. Current evolutionary movement is part of the progression of humankind towards a point of global unity.
- Consciousness is the apex of past evolutionary phenomenon and the expansion of consciousness, on both individual and collective level, is the Ultimate goal of future human evolution.
- Conscious transformation has now empowered humankind to steer future evolutionary movement. For the next social evolutionary apex to be fully realized demands collaborative action and global solidarity on the part of humankind.
- What must precede this positive state of globalization with the transformation of the individual consciousness so that it is also committed to reconstructing society into a new global reality. The far distant future is visualized as holding positive possibilities that will ultimately refurbish humankind into a new species of intellectual essence and social behaviour.”

Thus, the purpose of education becomes the evolution of consciousness, a process of being and becoming. The transition from being to becoming is a gradual process of becoming more and more aware of one’s own consciousness, and learning to act from it (Satprem, 2008). The word consciousness derives from the Latin root *cum*, meaning ‘with’ and *scio* meaning ‘know’. There are different meanings of the word consciousness, but in the context of evolution of consciousness the definition is consciousness as experience. Zeman (2001) describes consciousness as the content of experience from a moment to the next. The texture of an experience, through its qualitative and subjective dimensions. Consciousness is personal, and has memory connecting past consciousness with present. Contributors to consciousness are all the senses, combined with the major psychological processes such as thought, emotion, memory, imagination, communication, and action planning. Consciousness has a central role when it comes to human values. To become aware of one’s consciousness, and have an ongoing attentive and critical observation of the view from within can transform consciousness. Self-consciousness is this process of getting to know ourselves, from being to becoming. There has been little interest to study consciousness, and the resistance varied depending on the discipline from which it was approached. The main two reasons that there was little interest to study consciousness were that neuroscientists did not feel that it was a suitable subject for neuroscientific investigation, as expressed by Searle (2000, p.558), “consciousness seems too airy-fairy and touchy-feely to be a real scientific subject”. Others felt that they were not yet ready to tackle the problem of consciousness. Whatever resistance we have towards trying to understand consciousness better, it is a self-aware energy.

Consciousness is also a creative force, both individually and collectively. As expressed clearly by Natarajan (2013, p.01), the creativity of consciousness has a specific role to play when transforming society, through education:

“As the creativity of individuality in the leader, genius, artist and inventor; as social creativity that converts raw human experience into civilization; as cultural creativity that transforms human relationships into sources off rich emotional capacity; and as value-based educational creativity that can awaken and nurture young minds to develop and discover their own inherent capacity for knowledge in freedom. Through such moments do society and humanity evolve. Education is society’s most advanced

institution for conscious social evolution. Values are the essence of society's knowledge for highest accomplishment. Education imparts values in an evolutionary social organization that can hasten the emergence of that creative consciousness.”

Integral Education aims to bring awareness of the self, and through that, of others. With a deepening individual and collective consciousness can bring out the creativity needed to transform the world we live in towards new values for human unity and a sustainable development on Earth. Such an education supports the individual to learn to see and connect to that which is real and true by developing all the faculties of their consciousness – seeing, hearing, thinking, communicating, body and emotions. Knowledge is no longer seen as fact content or skills transferred from a curriculum through a teacher to the student, but inner knowledge that is discovered and experienced by the individual. To do this requires the individual to develop all the parts of their being, as consciousness is taken in through the sensorial experience of the whole being (Neeltje, 200; Partho, 2007; Krishnamurti, 2008). At the centre of the being Sri Aurobindo describes what he calls the ‘psychic being’. Consciousness of this part of the being is usually hidden behind more ordinary consciousness, but when allowed to come to the forefront it can guide the individual to the innermost truth, free to see that which is real away from ego, conditioning, and outer influences (Aurobindo, Sri & Mother, The, 2008).

An Integral Education is structured around three principles, the first being that *nothing can be taught*. Everything needed for the creative consciousness to develop is already within each child, like critical thinking, imagination, and independence. Consciousness cannot be taught, it has to be experienced and discovered by each individual for themselves. The second principle is that *the mind needs to be consulted in its own growth*. Each individual is different, grows and develops at a different pace, has different interests and needs. Allowing for this diversity is a foundation to create an atmosphere for development and growth in a living environment of unity in diversity through acceptance, care and compassion in the every day. The third principle is *working from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be*. Here real-life opportunities become the doorway to learning, by using the past and present experiences of the individual and collective, to transform consciousness and become agents of change, bringing new qualities, values and knowledge to move towards a future planetary citizenship (Berggreen-Clausen, 2020).

Education reflected in individual action for sustainable development

Educators have a key role in manifesting these qualities and values for a future planetary citizenship, and need to face the challenges of transformational leadership, through new insights, innovations and ways of redefining the aims and methods of education. Developing consciousness in education can be seen as two sided. One is the inner work, where the individuals’ faculties of the mind, body and spirit are refined. The second is developing a literacy in the sense of the social practice of students co-constructing their knowledge, understanding and communication through perspectives of history, science and critical thinking. Building a sense of global citizenship, where learning is no longer assimilation of content knowledge, but a contingent, multidirectional process that not just influences not just changes in the individual learner’s behaviour and competencies, but in deeper changes of consciousness when relating to the relationship between oneself and the world (Freire, 2000; Joshi, 2011; Mendoza, 2017; Rich, 2012; White, 2007).

Self-reflection/self-inquiry are the processes where, through one's consciousness, an individual can learn to observe oneself and watch oneself living (Uljens, 2002; Banerjee, 2014). By becoming more aware of one's thoughts and actions not only brings self-awareness, but also the ability to better understand other people and the world around, and increasingly rise above pulls of conditioning from society. With a conscious and reflective connection to a deeper knowledge and truth that exists within each human being, actions in life would be taken with the capacity to change. If children can become independently free with regards to choices relating to culture, traditions and expectations of society, new values can be brought to the forefront through their actions (Banerjee, 2014; Rich, 2012).

This brings us to the next aspect of education for sustainable development – value change. Long term value change requires shifts in many areas, but it can be seen that in adults, and especially older adults, value systems are already crystallized and very difficult to change. Yet the period of childhood and adolescence is a time of pivotal change, where the individual undergoes biological, cognitive, social and value transformations (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). To understand what values have governed our actions throughout human history, and what lenses leaders in the world act from, we can look to Spiral Dynamics. According to the theory of Spiral Dynamics, we need to move toward deep values that for the first time in human history merge internal and external forces, and the impacts these have on both individuals and organizations. Where both individually and collectively there is an inclination towards more appropriate ways of being which take only in accordance with a continued ensured balance and sustained systems between people and with nature, existence becomes about being, not having or doing. With this comes also a freedom from fear and compulsiveness, leading to an existential freedom and new ecological perspectives. Leadership would bring values like trust, responsibility, involvement and curiosity into its organisations (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000). This change of values needs to come through education.

The cultural subject's role in education for Human Unity

If the individual is formed by its culture, how can culture be consciously created? Through education, by rethinking practices, education organisation, teaching methods and curricula to actively contribute to seeking unity in diversity. When looking at educational design that will serve a radical social change, those in the field of education need to take a critical and transformational positioning in regards to both methods and curricula. In supporting young individuals in developing their critical consciousness that will allow them to transcend existing social constructs, curricula and methods used play a very important role (Ulyens & Ylimaki, 2015).

Understanding and knowing more about the society that formed us, will also bring with it the keys to change it (Freire, 2000; Joshi, 2011). Our individual histories and experiences influence how we think, and we have to examine our own individual histories in order to unearth what has shaped our current identities. When we work through history, both our own and the history of others, we start to understand the world and how past, present and future are connected. When we try to understand diversity, it is not enough to acknowledge differences, but we also need to understand the narratives of these differences and how they influence our identification as cultural subjects to this journey (Nordgren, 2017). It needs to be acknowledged that in an educational reform the different individuals and the different schools within the

community will have very different perspectives based on their different histories, their cultural backgrounds and the goals that each one has (Kenny, 2022).

Unity without diversity will result in a society with cultural repression and hegemony, while the opposite, diversity without unity, will lead to fracturing. It is therefore essential that education works for the co-existence of unity and diversity in balance with each other. To find this balance the foundations need to be put in place through which learning can happen (Nordgren, 2017).

Present realities

To understand resistance to change I have chosen to look at critical pedagogy, to identify the links between radical educational leadership and psychoanalysis. There is a relevant connection between the two when looking at resistance to change. Psychoanalysis is of interest when studying the formation of oppressed consciousness, and how the system we are trapped in today oppressed itself. It is the very traumas that society suffers from that puts in place a defence mechanism to reproduce itself as an ideology, in and through the very same subjects that it violates. And in those subjects is an unconscious willingness to continue to follow the structures that are causing the harm. To be able to dig deep and uproot this pattern, a consciousness at a psychical depth can be found in the intersection between critical pedagogy and psychoanalysis. There is a need for a model of the psyche that can move go deeper than the conscious experience itself. A criticism of education today is that it does not educate beyond the surface level, of needs and desires. When looking at radical educational transformation, we cannot just work on this level driven by instincts, but actually need to look at how to influence the subject from within. The unconscious is the gap, fracture or cut from which associations are formed around the psyche. When looking through the lens of critical pedagogy and psychoanalysis, the separation from the old, unconscious, and the new, conscious is what is highlighted (Freire, 2000; Armonda, 2022).

Parents and teachers tend to fall back on the security and stability of mainstream education, which is a major block when trying to transform the foundational aims and practices of education. Transformational educational leadership, where teachers and parents begin to lead the change, is needed. “The ultimate test of understanding rests on the ability to transform one’s knowledge into teaching” (Kenny, 2022, p.85). The steps towards leadership will help stakeholders in understanding the aims of a new education, bring curiosity and courage to experiment with implementation methods. Students developing a deeper consciousness towards sustainability and human solidarity is directly linked to the teacher’s intrinsic values and how they lead the transformation through what learning opportunities they cultivate with and for their students, and how this immersion is continuous (Savelyeva & Douglas, 2016).

Resistance to change

Freire (2000, p.36), states that “Fear of freedom, of which the possessor is not necessarily aware, makes him see ghosts. Such an individual is actually taking refuge in an attempt to achieve security, which he or she prefers to the risk of liberty”. Sharma (2017, p.229-230) shares that “We relate to resistance not as something wrong or bad, but as an inevitable part of change. Generating and sustaining community engagement in the face of resistance is vital” ... “BEING courageous in spite of fears and knowing that we are bigger than any fears keep us engaged”. These two concepts make a definition of resistance and fear of change that is relevant to this study. We

need to be aware of the fears that exist and how these can affect what an individual experiences while simultaneously holding trust and belief in the vision and aims of Integral Education, in order to find and hold the courage to persevere through change.

Armonda (2022) indicates that radical subjective and social change can be seen as a form of psychoanalysis. Such an analysis can through an intervention of critical pedagogy be divided into five different areas:

- The first is the provocative relationship between the object of change and the existential context of those engaging in trying to understand and communicate around it. In this case a paradigm shift in education as the object, a field that is still very little explored.
- The second is the communication about the change itself, which is done through an analysis of the what the paradigm shift implies. In this communication gaps become apparent, as something that is new and has not yet been done does not yet have the terminology through which to clearly define itself, but also the areas that may be sensitive to raise as they move the subject out of the comfort zone of the known. “The effect is a discourse blocked by obstacles and cut up by silences” (Armonda, 2022, p122). These gaps are what is not said, and highlight what is real (the trauma), rather than depicting reality as a “material order”. The pattern of how the subject relates to these gaps, is through distortions in communication through concealment and avoidance.
- The third is what is expressed by the real, which is different from what we know as our own reality. The real has a multitude of perspectives.
- The fourth is an affect (fear) that measures a relation to the truth, which is often embarrassing, painful, or wounding and distortions in the communication around it are confirmed by refusal of stakeholders to engage in it deeper. (Armonda, 2022)
- The fifth is the effect of this - the subject’s incompleteness, in this context the teachers and parents in Auroville, the relationship between the subject and the object, recognising the incompleteness. It shows the challenges that limit the individual, and a journey that requires full freedom from inner and outer limitations. “If fear of freedom is a “fight from the real,” the option of freedom implies the opposite trajectory, namely, the direct engagement with the real”. (Armonda, 2022, p123).

Through a process like this, individuals can be supported through problem-posing educational approach, though an intentionality of process. To, through steps, becoming conscious, not just of the challenges faced, but to actually become conscious of one’s consciousness, which in itself is a liberation, preparing for transformation of the being to be possible (Freire, 2000).

Towards a paradigm shift in education

Transformational educational leadership

Humankind is at a crossroads and can choose to consciously participate in its own evolution, and Aurobindo (1977) challenged educators to participate in this, seeing educational as laboratories of evolutions and the teachers as evolution agents (White, 2007). In the preface to Kahn (2010, p.xvii), this role of educators to change education

from today's capitalist aims is defined: "As educators, we are invited to commit ourselves to a critical eco-pedagogy that courageously embraces a new paradigm for the living of a transformative ecological praxis – one that is shaped by the power of human emotions, the cultural rituals of diverse ways of being, a deep respect for universal rights, and the integration of planetary consciousness." Paolo Freire (2000, p.39) has a slightly different view on radical transformation than Kahn. "The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a 'circle of certainty' within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled." I also find a clarity in Sharma (2017, p.7), with the simple formulation "As radical systems transformers, we are unwilling to let the status quo remain, and we take the risks necessary to make a difference that matters". The transformational leadership that I wish to highlight includes all these three definitions: the courage and commitment of Kahn, fearlessly confronting reality as it is of Freire, and the determination of transformation of Sharma.

Theoretical framing

As this study aims to grasp the reality of the journey to transforming education and tries to diagnose the underlying social processes that create a resistance to this change, I have chosen to use Critical Theory as a foundation for the study. The reasons why this theory matches my study are several. It aims to function as a way to critically examine the constraints that lie within for example judgment, ability of evaluation, as well as transformative activities (Thompson, 2017). What stands out in this theory is the concept of "critique", which includes both judgment/resistances, but also how to relate to the world. In the context of education there is a visible distinction between the realities of everyday life and practices in relation to the deeper intentions of Auroville as a place for educational experimentation and research. An assumption that lies behind this study is that our human conditioning brings fear and resistance to change when stepping out of our comfort zones, which makes the work to transform education a difficult task for the different stakeholders.

For this purpose, as stated by Thompson (2017), we need to look beneath the apparent human behaviours that are visible to us outwardly and try to understand the underlying unconscious structures that produced them. "A critical theory of society is therefore set with the task of uncovering the social conditions under which knowledge about itself is articulated, since the way we comprehend the objective world is related to the ways we conceive of ourselves. At the same time, it was a form of thinking that is designed not only to comprehend, but also to transform: its purpose is to change not only our knowledge of the objective world – of society, of institutions, of culture, and so on – but simultaneously the nature of the subject in a practical sense" (Thompson, 2017, p.2). This quote from Thompson about describing the deeper intent of critical theory is aligned with the purpose of my study, to understand the process of human progress in the context of education in Auroville. The use of critical theory will help to identify the relationship between thoughts and feelings about education in Auroville and actual leadership and practices striving toward a paradigm shift in education. The ability to shape systems, structures and activities based on deeper reflection is the base

for transformation on society, and to be critical in this process is essential in educational research in Auroville as a living-laboratory.

To complement Critical Theory, I will also use Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a theoretical base for the study. As someone who has been working in the field of education in Auroville for many years, I see my own education and knowledge as necessary to be able to guide this research. I came to this research topic based on my preconceptions, and my subjectivity will thereby be a part of the analytical process. Although I have my own assumptions that lie as a base for this study, this research is aimed at understanding the realities of Auroville education today by learning from the experiences of others. Through interviewing teachers who have had long term and key roles in the different Auroville schools, I want to access their lived experiences. I will aim to theorize their experiences through questions that will assess their challenges, strengths, needs and areas of growth.

Phenomenology will help me find the perspectives of the different Auroville schools. Both what 'is' experienced and 'how' it was experienced are lifted through phenomenology, of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, of the way we perceive and understand phenomena, and the meaning phenomena have in our subjective experience (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p.92). This is useful when looking at the intersections of transformational educational leadership together with resistance to change in the Auroville context. Looking at it from this perspective, this research study hopes to find new deeper meaning in the experiences. What is especially interesting with Hermeneutic Phenomenology is that it looks at human beings as actors in the world, and is interested in the relationship between individuals and the reality in which they live. It is from the conscious experience of each person, influenced by the society they live in, the wider world, and their own personal history, that each one's understanding is built. This is linked to social, cultural and political contexts (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Although Auroville is specifically created for experimentation in education, and everyone who lives in Auroville has this awareness and has made this choice as teachers and parents, there is still not the ability to find trust/ drive to transform education. Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio (2019) describe this as situated freedom. This implies that although individuals or societies are free (as in the case of Auroville), this freedom is held back by conditions of their lives and backgrounds, which impacts and influences the choices made by both parents and teachers in their educational practices.

Method

The chosen theoretical framing through Critical Theory and Hermeneutic Phenomenology was used to create a method that could function as a tool for the collection of data and material analysis. To build a qualitative interview study, interview questions were developed based on key concepts from previous research gathered through the literature review. Deep interviews with teachers representing Auroville schools aimed to extract the lived experiences of Auroville education. One long term teacher from each school, holding both the vision of the school as well as its history of best practices and challenges, were interviewed. The material was then analysed through a process of Hermeneutic Phenomenology, using a critical perspective to analyse the themes that emerged.

Although Critical Theory is highly relevant and suited for this study through the philosophical aspirations of Auroville in emergence with its social realities, I can feel that outcomes of the study may be more practical on a level of value change, rather than of actually being instrumental for more concrete systemic change. I believe it will draw out the human restrictions in its relation to transformation, rather than looking at the deeper social interplay and the constructs of our society. Here could lie a gap in this theory that this study is not able to fill. Although I can see a much bigger study needed to understand the systemic changes that can transform education, the method would need to be complemented with Change Theory which I have chosen not to include due to the limited scope of this thesis.

Interviews

The schools in Auroville are known in the community to be very different from each other, yet my actual knowledge of the schools is based more on assumptions and hearsay than deeper knowledge. Therefore, I felt the need to start the interviews with a more general introduction to each theme giving a direction, followed by questions offering flexibility to flow within the context of each school. Although the interviews were semi-structured, they also offered an open-endedness when needed, to allow a deepening into areas that were relevant for the individual school. This made it possible for stories representative of each school to be shared, as well as address the situated freedom of the Auroville context, to pinpoint what holds back progress and what allows for change. My own general knowledge and experience of the Auroville schools, as well as my confidence in the subject of education, allowed me the possibility to move in this way between the interview questions (Appendix 3). I wanted questions that would help identify the school's needs in order for a research outcome that could give concrete next steps for progress, and practical aims to work towards.

There are two types of schools run by Auroville. The schools for children whose parents have actively made the decision to join Auroville, and the outreach schools run by Auroville to cater to the education of children living in the close bioregion surrounding Auroville. For this study I decided to only include the nine schools catering to children of parents living in Auroville. The reason for this is that I wanted to see the link between education and the wider aims of Auroville, to observe any possible connections between these. Including all the schools run by Auroville would also have made the study too large and wide for the timeframe and limitations I had to work within.

All nine schools were invited to take part in the study through an email explaining its purpose. The schools are: Pre-creche (age 2-3), Nandanam kindergarten (age 3-6), Aha Kindergarten (age 3-6) and Centre Field kindergarten (age 3-6), Transition school (age 6-14), Deepanam school (age 6-14), The Learning Community (age 0-14), Last school (age 14-19+) and Future school (age 14-19+). All the schools responded with openness to take part, except one, the Pre-creche, that shared that they were not interested to participate in the study.

Each school selected the teacher that was to take part in the interview. The requirements were that the teacher could take part in the interview in English, and had been working in the school long enough to understand the overall functioning of the school, its history, aspirations and challenges. These semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative from each of the Auroville schools.

At the start of the interviews it was shared with the teachers that although they were participating in the interviews as individuals, they were there to represent their school. For the teachers to be in these two roles is also visible in the interviews, where they sometimes need to express their personal reflections on a topic in comparison to that of the school as a whole. Having this in mind before and knowing that the teachers would not be fully neutral in their responses as they could be if there were representing only themselves and not the school as a whole, I offered a progressive clarification of the question themes. After this I proceeded into the interview itself where I had some questions that I chose to prioritise with more direct answers, while others were more open ended. In this way I could include components that all the interviewees needed to cover in their sharing, and use prompts to steer the interview towards these when needed. A probe I used a lot was reflecting, reformulating something shared to get the interviewee to focus or expand on that area. This helped me to realign the conversation when needed, to still have a degree of standardization and comparability between the different interviews to be able to conduct a scientific study (Gillham, 2000).

Because of the openness of the interviews the interviewees were also permitted a certain level of control which I felt was needed especially in regards to sensitive topics. According to Gillham (2000), this way of interviewing can have unique benefits, like breadth and depth of information, filling of gaps or highlighting areas that may have been missed otherwise. The relationship between outwardly portrayed aspects of the schools as well as internal more privately kept areas, could also come up, addressing the complex relationships between these that may have been missed if not allowing the interviewees to take certain charge of direction and content (Gillham, 2000). In some cases there was a challenge with the sharing going too far off on another tangent, and I had to work to bring the conversation back on topic.

The interviews took place either in the schools or in the homes of the teachers. I had asked the teachers for 1 1/2 hours of their time but most of the interviews ended up taking up to 2 hours, with the consent of the interviewee. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Due to the multicultural diversity of the participants and their different English accents, many of the interview recordings were challenging and very time consuming to transcribe, as the automated transcription programs could not understand the pronunciation used.

Being both in the role of a researcher studying Education for Sustainable Development as well as a person deeply involved in the field of education in Auroville

since many years, I have tried to assume an openness, leaving my pre-conceived notions behind when entering the interview situations. The interviews were structured around four main themes that I have chosen to form this study around. These themes were based on the literature study of previous research in the field as a foundation, as well as input of my own experience with education in general, taking into account the challenges I experienced and witnessed within the Auroville context.

I chose to use Hermeneutic Phenomenology as it's a study of both the situation of each individual school as well as the larger Auroville context that the schools are serving. This approach towards the parts and the whole analyses in a cyclical, open and interrogative way. I wanted to understand the teachers and schools, and as an outcome of this study bring awareness to Auroville as a living laboratory in relation to this. But in this I also have myself as the person doing the Hermeneutic Phenomenological work, and ultimately myself as a participant in the phenomena I am studying. In the analysis I am faced with the challenge of where to place myself in relation to this study, as a researcher of Education for Sustainable Development, or a participant in education in Auroville as a parent, teacher or teacher trainer. I have attempted to stay in the role of the researcher in the Analysis and Results Presentation, yet in the Discussion my voice in relation to the previous research and work in Auroville may reflect itself in some parts.

Method of analysis

To analyse the interview material, I followed the steps of Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The data material was sorted to identify themes of interesting phenomena, with focus on the lived experiences in the schools. The emerging themes were documented in writing, maintaining a focus on the emerged phenomena and how they were experienced. Links, overlaps and intersections between themes were identified, and then further categorized into topics, with an interpretation of each, as described by Fejes & Thornberg (2015). My aim was not only to reflect a generality in the content of the analysis, but also to link individual schools' interpretations and practices to theory from the key concepts explained in the literature review. By doing so through an interpretive phenomenological analysis allowed a variety of nuances to come through, rather than only portraying themes that included all or many of the schools. The reason why I chose to include this form of analysis was that new experiences can be either positive or negative. This is especially relevant when it comes to change, where individuals and systems can react very differently. Something new or different from what we know as the norm may be experienced as something negative, or in the case of this study as something bringing fear or resistance to change. Such experiences may be very personal, and only certain people within the context may experience them. It can also be challenging to express difficulties openly, particularly if situations are conflicting within or between schools, and therefore experiences have as much value when shared and require a big amount of trust and openness in the interview situation.

As a last step of the analysis, I studied how these different themes/areas contributed to identifying a deeper understanding of both the parts and the whole, as well as seeing how different areas could enhance the meaning of the others. In an analysis following Hermeneutic Phenomenology, the interpretations grew from a spiral formed process where new understanding, thoughts and ideas grew through the data, as it was

revisited again and again with new entrance points or perspectives (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015).

Participation/collaboration with others

The scope of participation included all the Auroville schools, and each school selected their representative to take part in the interview. Although I formulated and structured the interview questions based on my literature review and research questions, I asked the schools to send in any questions they would like to have included in the study ahead of the interview to ensure that any important points I may have missed were addressed and included. I wanted all the schools to feel that the questions were relevant, and that the outcome of the study could help the collective deepening in education both within schools and in Auroville as a whole. One school chose not to participate, the reason given that there was not an interest from anyone in the school team to participate. It would be of interest to understand why in this case, which would be something to follow up on outside of this research.

Research ethical considerations

From an ethical perspective, only the names of the schools were presented, not the names of individual teachers. The overall presentation of the study was done in a supportive way for all parties, with anonymity, and without framing or pointing out anyone in particular but rather looking at trends/patterns as a whole. The participating schools were informed of the purpose of the project, as well as the role of the individual teacher who was selected to represent the school and be interviewed.

Key terms

In this thesis there is certain terminology that I would like to define to clarify definitions in the context of this presentation. Some terms have been defined deeper in the Background and Literature Review chapters.

Mainstream Education: Education as what it is known in the world today, based on knowledge content and development of skills, following a predefined government curriculum. Schools with classrooms where this takes place, with the lead of a teacher whose responsibility it is to transfer the curriculum to all the students. Children sorted into grades by age, and fed through the educational system at a set pace, often through a system of competition and comparison. The main purpose of education is to form children/youth growing up to become citizens to contribute towards a society striving for economic growth. In this term I also include “alternative” methodologies who still base their work around this, but take a more “child-centred” approach, have an “eco-profile”, are “activity-based”, “democratic” or other.

Integral Education: Ideals of a new way of education to serve the evolution of consciousness envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa, founders of Auroville. An education where we remove all that we are preconditioned to relate to education, and re-think how it could be formed to strive towards a new way of living and being on Earth.

Universal/Global Education: Just as Mainstream Education is now a Universal/Global Education, I use this now when studying how we could understand a new education that would serve a humanity needing to shift its consciousness towards sustainability and human unity.

Sustainable Development: This term is used when addressing changes in our way of living and being on Earth, to stay within the planetary boundaries of the *ecological ceiling* and the *social foundations*, to contain a safe and just space for humanity, and create a regenerative and distributive economy. This term addresses environmental, social and economic aspects (Raworth, 2017).

Education for Sustainable Development: An education serving to transform the ideas of Sustainable Development into a new way of living on Earth.

Human Unity: To be able to work toward Human Unity, something needs to change in the foundations of our human values that we live and act from. The biggest obstacle to harmony and peace is egoism. Human unity is a value consciousness that can take human kind - individually and collectively, beyond ego (Auroville website, n.d.).

Education for Human Unity: An education formed through new structures, systems, and practices supporting unity in diversity. Discarding the segregating and ego-centric educational practices of today and redesigning education with a new purpose of care, peace and harmony between peoples.

Teacher: In Auroville many terms are used in education, such as facilitator or guide. In this thesis it is simply used as the adult working with education in the context of “schools”.

School: The term school is used although all those included in this study don't identify themselves as schools in the usual use of the word.

Teacher training: Included in this term is all work to develop oneself to deepen the work with children/youth.

Transformational educational leadership/transformational leadership: Leadership to radically change ways of understanding, organising and changing education. Being pro-active and active in this work individually and collectively to create a movement of transformation.

Analysis

The questions for the interviews were formulated based on previous research and through the perspective of Critical Theory. When processing the material from the interviews, Hermeneutic Phenomenology was used in order to identify themes of interesting phenomena based on the human experience of teachers working to transform education. Finally, I wanted questions that would help identify the schools needs in order to move forward, next concrete steps for progress, and practical aims to work towards.

Using Critical Theory, I have analysed the themes that emerged from the interview material. This was done with the following areas as tools for the analysis, each one addressing one of the research questions in order to delve deeper:

- 1) Thinking to understand and transform
- 2) Judgement/resistance in how to relate to the world
- 3) Social condition under which knowledge about itself is articulated

Addressing the research questions through this critical perspective, wants to uncover the social conditions under which knowledge is articulated, perceived and related to (Thompson, 2017).

The following table shows the areas of study, and the themes that emerged from the interview study, analysed from the stance of Critical Theory:

1) Thinking to understand and transform:
Education serving the evolution of consciousness
Individual consciousness
Sub-areas that emerged are: Parts of the being Self-Knowledge/Consciousness
Collective consciousness
Sub-areas that emerged are: Human Unity, Sustainable Development
Structures/Systems/Practices
Sub-areas that emerged are: Three principles of Integral Education, Free progress
2) Judgement/resistance in how to relate to the world:
Present realities
Education in Auroville today
Resistance to change
Sub-areas that emerged are: Caught in between past-present-future, Fear of change & Judgement, Stepping out of comfort zones
3) Social condition under which knowledge about itself is articulated:
Towards a paradigm shift in education
Confirming the role of education in Auroville
Sub-areas that emerged are: The choice of Integral Education, The YUCA program, Auroville as a Learning City, Work with parents
Transformational Leadership
Sub-areas that emerged are: Start from present towards the vision, Teacher Training, Content of professional development program, Create a university in/of Auroville, Research, Maintenances.

Results presentation

The results presentation follows the same structure as the literature review and interview questions, and the themes that emerged relating to each area are presented here. The reflections shared by the teachers are brought together under the theme headings that emerged through the data analysis. Quotes have been included in places to bring forth the voice of the teachers. In the presentation I have chosen to use the words *teacher* and *school* interchangeably. The teachers are representing their schools in the interviews, but as individuals it is their personal interpretations of reality that are shared.

Education serving the evolution of consciousness

To find answers to the first research question: **How do Auroville schools define Integral Education?** I have based the analysis on a process using Critical Theory. *Thinking to understand and transform* was the first step used to process the material from the interviews. Through this perspective, a summary of key points from the themes that emerged under the first heading are presented. The themes that relate to this entry point are: Individual consciousness, Collective Consciousness, and Structures/Systems/Practices.

Individual Consciousness

Although all the schools are in agreement that education should be holistic and see to development of all the parts of the being, none of the schools go deeper into what this entails in practice. A few teachers share examples of what they mean by the parts of the being, by giving examples of mental faculties like concentration, reasoning, critical thinking and imagination that need to be trained, or physical development of areas like coordination, endurance and stamina, or emotional development such as self-control/self-discipline refinement of the senses, empathy, and to learn to understand their emotions. Here again, there is very little defining what this means in actual practice.

Most of the schools mention the ‘psychic being’. Some schools define this as a connection to the self, to a place inside that is free from conditioning, impulses of ego, desires, mental blocks or expectations. One teacher described it in this way: “When the development of the physical, mental, vital and spiritual are all met, there can be harmony within the individual, allowing the psychic being to become present and leading at the centre of oneself”. The ‘psychic being’ is seen to be more at the forefront in small children, and then fades as they grow into this world. Some teachers describe the purpose of education as being to allow the ‘psychic being’ to become the leader of the individual’s life and actions, coming from a place of a truth consciousness, a deeper inner wisdom.

That education should see to the development of all the parts of the being is unanimous in the schools, but yet its purpose does not become visible other than that it means seeing to the overall well-being of the child, and the statement that the psychic should be brought to the forefront. Only three of the schools make connections between the parts of the being and the development of consciousness, and that this connection is the unification of all the parts of the being.

None of the schools give concrete examples of how this work to bring the psychic being to the forefront can be seen through an educational perspective. Perhaps teachers are still too “disorganised, with too complex senses, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, ideas, needs, fears, hopes, frustrations, complexes, and appetites that refuse to hold together into any kind of coherent structure”, as shared by a teacher. Several teachers described that to be able to support a child towards an aim in education one first needs to have an experience of that aim, and connect to it oneself as a teacher.

Although all the teachers saw that developing self-knowledge and consciousness had a key importance in education, very little reflected what working with this would actually serve education in a wider, global sense. The focus was more on self-knowledge and its inner work, such as helping an individual to realign, to understand themselves in different situations, to make choices and to learn to relate to others by knowing oneself better.

Some teachers expressed challenges not knowing how to support children to work on developing self-knowledge and to grow their consciousness. Main reasons given were that education in the schools still evolves a lot around content learning. Teachers also don't have knowledge and methods to move away from the present systems they are working through. A need was expressed to go deeper into what consciousness means in education to learn more, and understand how it can be integrated into actual practices. They expressed that research on this is needed to better understand what consciousness is and how education can help it expand. One school shared about how they organise education to be self-directed, where children learn planning and reflection skills to develop an understanding of their own learning process. Focus is on learning how to learn, and to observe what drives or hinders one's learning. Self-directed learning also allows children to follow that which is alive and relevant to them in the moment, and to organize their learning around that.

Some schools shared concrete examples of practices through which children/youth can work towards an evolution of consciousness. These examples could give an insight into the kind of program that can be created to move from the traditional subject curriculum towards a program with the main aim of developing consciousness.: Awareness through the body, Natural Horsemanship, deep listening skills through Non-Violent Communication tools, weekly mentoring through individual planning and reflection, art as an opportunity to find silence and harmony, history through the perspective of past-present-future, and free time in nature.

Collective consciousness

For children growing up in the world today, there are two areas that education needs to work with. One is environmental consciousness, and the other striving towards human unity. Both these are “learnt” only through deepened and widened individual and collective awareness translated into action. To understand how this is put into practices in Auroville schools, teachers were asked about the connections between this bigger vision of Auroville and education.

Very little was shared by the schools that related to collective consciousness, the role of the individual as a cultural subject, or how the multicultural setting of Auroville serves education towards Human Unity. What stood out in the area of collective consciousness was that none of the schools reflected on how the multi-cultural diversity can be/is used for the educational purpose of human unity. The reflections shared were all very locally situated, mainly addressing challenges within the

Auroville context rather than looking at the purpose of education serving something globally.

Only a few schools shared thoughts regarding the need to build a common Auroville educational culture through which the cultural subject can be formed. The question was brought through the interview questions to see if the schools thought that a more clearly defined educational culture in Auroville would support the work with education both within Auroville, as well as to become recognised as Auroville education to the world. The present reality in the schools was that it is very unclear what Auroville education serves, both within school but more between schools and with Auroville as a whole, where communication is very limited.

At present each school seemed like a separate entity, struggling with very situated issues, and only a few links to Auroville or to global perspectives could be observed. Most challenges described were in regards to the gaps between the international and Indian community members and individuals from the local villages struggling to integrate fully because of their proximity to the traditions and societal expectations that they have joined Auroville to break free from.

There was a recognition from some teachers that schools need to become aware of both their own history and the history of the other schools, to understand how the past, present and future are connected. The same concept could be applied to the wider community, to parents from all the corners of the world, each one with their history, their present, and aspirations for the future. One teacher expressed that it is not enough as it is now, to just accept the differences between schools, teachers, and parents, and a more active work needs to take place.

Some concrete examples that emerged explaining how to teach subjects like history in the Auroville context were especially interesting in order to widen perspectives and build a collective consciousness. Only a few schools use these subjects in this way, while other schools work with these subjects within the mainstream curricular context. The way history is taught in mainstream education is actually outdated, and in a multicultural society such as Auroville history can only be taught through a global perspective, as to not work against what Auroville is trying to serve. Traditionally history is taught through a single perspective, that only reflects a part of reality. Two of the schools shared something that is unique in the purpose and different with Integral Education, is how it strives for the individual to learn to synthesize. To do this, education needs to offer the children/youth the whole picture, help students make links and connections between things in the world, and see their place/role in the whole, as in the example of history.

Another practice shared by one of the schools was the participatory decision-making meetings facilitated by the children. In these meetings most decisions regarding the everyday functioning of the school are decided upon collectively, and children and adults have equal voice. Anyone can bring a topic to be discussed and decisions are made on consensus. The process of taking the time to come to decisions where everyone is heard, everyone's perspective is taken into consideration, and there is an openness from all to adjust to find a solution that everyone feels ready to move ahead with involves developing deep listening skills, openness, receptivity and creativity and other skills that are needed to build unity in diversity.

Only a few of the schools work with aspects of education for sustainable development, while many teachers were not aware of this concept at all. Most of the teachers shared that Auroville in itself acts as a learning environment for environmental awareness. This is so rooted in the Auroville culture that children growing up in Auroville are fully submerged in living with their environment, education in this field comes mostly through life in Auroville and not in school. Ecological consciousness is engrained in children and youth and never questioned. New children blend in quickly by observing others.

Structures/Systems/Practices

Integral Education is based on three guiding principles: *Nothing can be taught, the mind must be consulted in its own growth, and working from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be.* Working through the three principles strives towards *free progress education.* The three principles resonate strongly with international research on transformative education, as well as with research on education for sustainable development. Here is the outcome of what teachers shared about the three principles and free progress education.

The content that emerged from the interviews regarding the three principles of Integral Education held enough collective input from several schools to create a theoretical framework that could define the three principles. Through this new structures and practices could be formed to support building and educational culture as a common base in Auroville. This could support defining what Integral Education is in the context of Auroville. Such clarity could help bring unity between diverse ways of implementation in the schools the heal the division and confusion that exists now.

All the schools express that they work through the three principles, but the understanding of the principles varies significantly between schools. The answers differed from very basic interpretations of the principles in some schools, to deeper translations into practices in other schools. Below some of the deeper interpretations are shared:

The first principle gives the guidance for developing individual consciousness. It is formulated as *'nothing can be taught'*, reflecting the view that the child has everything needed within for growth and development to happen. Learning is about developing consciousness, and this cannot be taught. This principle shifts learning from the mainstream teaching of subject content to developing all the parts of their being. Through this principle children develop self-knowledge. "Young people absorb and absorb. But they don't learn how to reformulate things to make them one's own, there is a distance that remains to all that has been absorbed. If this becomes a pattern you can end up as an adult feeling that you have received a lot of things and have a lot of things within you but nothing is your own. If we don't have words for our experiences, we don't actually own them. Then they remain someone else's words or experience. So a basic learning skill is not just to be able to soak it in, but to actually transform whatever you have learnt to integrate it into yourself. And then not just to keep it inside, but actually communicate it to others for it to really manifest in yourself". This reflection on learning to learn was shared by one of the teachers. Another teacher shared that "How to organise material, time management, have order, to come on time. These are basic skills needed otherwise children can get very lost".

Some of the Auroville schools have developed implementation practices. Examples of these that support children to develop self- knowledge:

- Let the child's curiosity drive the process
- Individual planning and reflection with all children
- Art to obtain inner silence and centre as well as being a creative outlet
- Experiencing and working through boredom
- To work from the child's intrinsic motivation
- To learn to integrate new experiences consciously through reflection
- To develop self-assessment skills
- Teaching is not imposed but to spark curiosity
- Critical thinking
- Develop imagination
- Organizational skills
- Reflection

The second principle shows presents a new structure replacing the mainstream system of sorting children by age and feeding them through a predefined content at a set yearly pace. Instead of addressing groups of children as grades/classes, these structures can fall away and each child can be addressed individually, allowing *the mind to be consulted in its own growth*. Teachers shared that in this kind of learning environment groupings formed naturally based on interests or needs. Instead of pushing children to compare and compete, such a system of organising education creates an atmosphere supporting cooperation, collaboration, acceptance and appreciation of diversity, but allowing and valuing differences. One teacher explains that "The most important thing with this kind of learning environment is that groupings can form naturally and children learn to work with each other and value each other's differences". Studies have shown that children benefit greatly in many ways from mixed age groupings. In such an environment everyone becomes a teacher and learner, and collaborative learning and problem solving together are encouraged to happen organically. This principle supports education to manifest unity in diversity through everyday lived experiences, building a collective consciousness.

Two schools shared about their work with the third principle, *from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be*. This principle works toward building a global consciousness, by integrating the first and second principles into real life practice. "To work from the near to the far is starting from what is present and alive for an individual or collective - be it an interest, a challenge, developmental need, or common project", as shared by a teacher. "Through this which is directly meaningful and relevant as a starting point, connections can be made to many different things, and both close and more distant goals can be worked towards. It's a transformative and empowering principle, to work for change through an aware process that touches and relates directly to the individual". One of the schools explained how they use history to work with this principle, by looking at the past-present-future narratives of history from different perspectives. History is a record of human evolution consciousness, and through it young people can understand how humanity has evolved over time, through its movements. History is the human adventure, when looked at through psychology instead of through facts and dates. This way of working could be applied to all culture, philosophy, psychology, economics. To start from the near, and work out to the far, from that which is in the present, to become agents to actively form the future.

Another school organises itself through interdisciplinary projects, from where children can direct their learning from real life situations, experiences and decisions. An example that schools shared about the importance to develop skills like deep listening, using tools from NVC with children to develop compassionate communication. One of the teachers shared that “When you are not looking at tests or chapters covered in a text book, but instead observing the changes in the child/youth, like their ability to reason, to make connections between things, to think critically, to listen to others, to step out of comfort zones and so many other things. Progress cannot be measured, just observed”. Another example is learning about food, how it grows, and how to create a sustainable relationship to this process. This school also used participatory decision making as a way for children to learn to learn to find solutions including everyone.

What can be seen in the examples from these two schools is that they are supported by the idea that transformational skills such as cognitive flexibility, trial and error, and an openness for change are the base for an unending education.

There were different understandings of the term *free progress* in the schools. Some schools say that they don't work with free progress education, others interpret it as being 'child centred' in the work, and some work on it as the process of becoming more and more free, not freedom interpreted as doing what you want based on impulses, likes and dislikes, but an inner freedom to follow that which is true to oneself, linked to developing self-discipline.

“One child may at one period need more work with one part of their being, deepening on their development like growth, or emotional challenges they are facing, or a specific interest they may have at that time. Whatever is relevant at that time needs to take precedence when creating an educational program for the child”, shared a teacher. Some of the teachers relate to such a program that follows individual needs as being chaotic, and don't feel ready to explore it. They don't have the knowledge of how to do it. It can feel very radical to some, and not everyone within the schools are ready to try. It requires a lot of flexibility, which can be difficult to fit within the frameworks of some of the schools. There is still a lot of academic focus and pressure in some schools, and teachers expressed that this makes it difficult to move towards more freedom.

Summary

When observing how the teachers in Auroville schools are *thinking to understand and transform*, it can be observed that the understanding of concepts of Integral Education for most schools is on a very theoretical level. Although examples were shared by the teachers in the interviews, it can be seen that very few schools shared concrete examples and a deeper relationship to the terminology used. There is a gap between thinking to understand and thinking to transform in the present reality in Auroville schools. Many teachers are interested in understanding Integral Education deeper, yet changing and deepening practices is not something that is very present.

Present realities

To answer the second research question **What are the challenges and opportunities for teachers/schools in Auroville?** the interview material addresses

Judgement/resistance in how to relate to the world from the perspective of Critical Theory. The themes that relate to this entry point are: Education in Auroville today, and Resistance to change. A summary of key points from these themes is presented.

Education in Auroville today

Teachers in the Auroville schools expressed a lot of limitations within the existing system that is preventing change. One of the areas was their own lack of knowledge and ability to make changes. They experience a gap between the concepts of Integral Education and their own ability to understand it and transform it into practices. “Then it just becomes something theoretical that we don’t really understand, even if we all say we are working on this in the schools”, shared a teacher.

Very few teachers have any formal teacher training, but since some schools still follow a mainstream organization and practices, teachers require the knowledge and skills for such an education. For this reason, human resources are required to support these teachers in areas like classroom management and subject teaching. One teacher shared “Then there is just a repetition of the same things that have been done before. This is the challenge, to be self-critical and to strive for progress within. We redo what is known to us as education instead of looking at our own self-discovery and then transmitting this journey and knowledge to the education of the children we work with”.

Some schools are caught between wanting to deepen practices, yet not having the full teacher teams on board for such a change. For this reason, several of the schools have found a middle ground, described more as a child-centred approach, and have settled there with stable routines and systems that work for them.

Resistance to change

Teachers face a lot of challenges in the conflict between past, present and future. Many parents are sceptical to education in Auroville, precisely because of the unclarity of what each schools offers. Parents move their children between Auroville schools, as well as to schools outside Auroville. This is very unsettling, processes with children are cut short, and group dynamics keep changing and become unbalanced. This is the present reality they face. At the same time all parents come with their baggage, past conditioning and expectations. They have ideas of what they want or don’t want for their children’s education. The teachers are sometimes caught between the parent’s expectation of an idealistic education, and the reality of their present functioning.

There was a great openness and sincerity that struck me deeply when it came to speaking of challenges that the schools face. I came into this study with the assumption that teachers would be more open to sharing about practices than about challenges, but here I was proved wrong. The reflections shared were deep when looking at resistance to change, both from the perspective of teachers and schools, and well as that of parents. All the schools but one described similar challenges that they face. I was taken by the openness of the teachers to share, and appreciate the trust put in me in my attempt to dig into these sensitive areas. The reflections from each school were self-critical, and each one was well aware of their limitations.

A theme that came up strongly was the dilemma of the past holding back development in the present. Individual examples like personal traumas relating to education that teachers and parents may have experienced impacted their choices and actions. Auroville faces both the huge diversity of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, as well as with different sections of the parent community struggling with change in different ways: parents grown up in Auroville, parents with family living in the villages surrounding Auroville, and parents who have moved to Auroville. Each of these groups show different tendencies, fears and needs. “There are many different cultures in Auroville, and people have their different patterns that they carry with them. Auroville’s cultural diversity is an opportunity to break personal patterns. Parents may be living more in the past, just touching on the present, which makes it difficult for them to relate to the education Auroville is striving towards for the future. Therefore, Auroville can be a place of great confusion, with a population both held by past patterns and conditioning, and at the same time actively trying to free themselves of this. It’s not a straight path, but a deep work of self-knowledge and consciously changing patterns in oneself as a parent, that not all are ready to do”, shared a teacher.

There was a shared challenge, as many teachers expressed that there is not yet a deeper understanding of how to practice integral education, and the concepts of it are new. Parents do not want an experimental process of trial and error allowing for teachers to be able to explore how to practice new ways of education. Parents are very critical and quick to judge, and easily pull their children out of one school and move them to another when they get scared or confused about the work in the school. The teachers don’t have the ability to communicate the ongoing process as they are discovering it at the same time as they are exploring new practices themselves. This has over the years created a lot of division between the schools, and also a lack of sharing between schools. There are expectations to deliver an education that is stable, known, and yet more fun and child-centred. Only very few parents support more radical experimentation away from the mainstream system.

The schools are unanimous that work with parents is essential for their work to deepen. Yet this is not a job that individual schools can do, as their work is in itself a huge and sometimes overwhelming task. All schools wanted parents to get more common information about the role of education in Auroville, so when joining the community, they would be more open to step out of their comfort zones, trust the best intentions of the schools and teachers, and allow the process needed to deepen in Integral Education. Parent education would need to work to support parents to understand their past conditioning, and help them to learn not to project their own history and patterns on their child, but open up for the freedom needed for new discoveries to be made.

Summary

Judgement/resistance in how to relate to the world is an interesting perspective to address the themes that emerged from the interviews, as the teachers relate directly to this in their sharing. Teachers are scared of change, as are parents. There is a dilemma between past traumas that the adults carry, in the present reality of where Auroville education is at, as well as the aspirations of an idealistic education that has not yet been attempted. Somewhere in between these there is a lot of fear and judgements, as well as settling in one’s comfort zones.

Towards a paradigm shift in education

To answer the research question: **Can teachers and parents become agents of transformational leadership through education?** this was looked at through the Critical theory perspective *social condition under which knowledge about itself is articulated*. The social conditions are defined by the attitude of people towards education, as well as what is needed to change societies attitudes towards Integral education for a paradigm shift. This is divided into the themes: Confirming the role of education in Auroville and Transformational leadership.

Confirming the role of education in Auroville

As Auroville is an intentional community, and everyone who has joined has done so to be a part of the project, it can be experienced as contradicting when so many parents who are open to alternative development in all other areas of society want to hold onto educational structures of the past for their children. To lead the change, it is not enough that teachers become more confident and are supported to deepen their understanding and implementation of Integral Education, the bigger work is to bring parents aboard to understand the realities of transformation within the educational system so they can support it rather than block it. It was suggested to introduce a large part on education in the program that new people joining Auroville need to participate in. Then parents would already be aware that this openness is required from them. It could also support if it is required of parents living in Auroville to send their children to school in Auroville, as there is now a strong and increasing trend to send children to mainstream education outside. In the same way that adults have to live and work in Auroville, children would need to be engaged in education in Auroville. A reflection from one of the teachers is that "...we can talk about big words in Auroville, like Integral Yoga, Integral Education, and Unity in Diversity. But sometimes these are just words if we don't see how to make this the essence of the education of the children in Auroville. To work from the present reality, not from big words that are not embodied". Education is the main place where the work towards the vision of Auroville can happen on a deeper level, not just in schools, but by the support of the community as a whole for this education to manifest.

Ideas of how to promote all of Auroville to be a city for learning was raised This could allow schools to specialise on different focus areas, and for children to use all of Auroville to create an individualised program for each one, and to actively be invited to participate in the create of Auroville by being welcome to take part in all of Auroville's functioning, activities, units and

Transformational leadership

Research needs to be an integral process to help deepen and develop Integral Education in the Auroville schools. As shared by a teacher "Now it's easy to just say that everyone is working with Integral Education in their own way, but we don't really understand what this means. If we start to talk about it with each other we can start to understand what Integral Education means to us in our present reality, and if this is the same thing as the Integral Education we are striving for. Or are we happy and satisfied doing things how we are? Is there a need to deepen the work, and if so, where do we start. There may be goals that are individual, within schools or for all schools in Auroville. We really need to talk more about this to build a common understanding".

Teachers expressed a need to work from present realities towards the vision, not expecting to reach a final destination but to progress consciously towards it. Some of the research topics that emerged were:

- Moving education from teaching content to development of consciousness
- How to assess new ways of learning
- How to support children to self-assess
- How to develop manuals to support new perspectives of teaching, like the example given of history.
- How to work with children in mixed age groupings

There was a request to add professional development days into the Auroville school calendar for all teachers from all schools to take part of. Many teachers expressed the need for training to be experimental, so that teachers get the opportunity to experience something, and have a sensorial landmark to go back to in the work with the children. Training should not be through lectures or traditional ways, but rather so that teachers get a practical experience of the three principles of Integral Education through the training itself, and to have this to relate back to when working with the children. Practices that have been developed in Auroville that support new ways of working could be shared, and experienced teachers could act as mentors for others. There was also a need to build more connections between teachers through informal conversations on education, to build an openness to reflect on challenges with support and understanding instead of judgement. A teacher shared that “If you hear other people sharing about their fears, next time you see them you will think differently about them, more caringly, more accepting of them, and also of oneself. Many fears are probably shared, but we feel alone in them when we don’t share about them. We can also understand ourselves better when we learn to understand other people. Recognise something that someone else is able to put words to that we did not know how to express ourselves”.

When asked which was the first area to address through professional development, most of the schools wanted to work on Courage. This was a very interesting outcome, and could be a powerful area to start a work with more transformational educational leadership in Auroville.

Areas that emerged for Professional Development were:

- Courage, learn to overcome fears and step out of comfort zones
- To get to know oneself
- To understand what consciousness is
- Learn to treat children as equals, participatory decision-making, self-directed learning
- To deepen in different practices that show a new way of education
- Build transformational leadership capacities for Integral Education
- NVC, learn deep listening and compassionate communication skills
- How to prepare for free progress
- Go deeper into the three principles of Integral Education
- Natural Horsemanship
- ATB

Summary

Social condition under which knowledge about itself is articulated can be looked at critically, to see how the vision of Auroville is hindered by its present circumstances. To work for change in a society where there is little knowledge and understanding of the vision for education, the conditions for transformation are missing. Teachers share the need to bring Auroville education together, for teachers to find support in each other and from each other. Professional development, research, and information to new families joining are some areas that emerged to enable progress.

Discussion

The outcome of this research study does not aim to state a definitive truth about Auroville education, nor give any generalising statements. Rather it aims to, through the eyes of those who have engaged with the school for many years, give an insight of the foundations, challenges and opportunities of education in the Auroville schools.

I want to acknowledge and reflect on what emerged through the interviews, but also observe critically and lift forth essential aspects that did not become fully visible. Auroville has a very specific purpose as a living laboratory, in which education plays a critical role. The question is if now, over 50 years after its inception, Auroville education is actively working towards serving human consciousness evolution?!

To discuss the results from the interviews, I have a need to relate back to the reason for the creation of Auroville as a living laboratory to explore ways to tackle the wicked problems the world faces today. As shared by Ahmed (2010), if education is a tool for transformation of society, education itself needs to represent that transformation. It can be seen that education has been given this central place in Auroville, as per the *Auroville Charter* (Appendix 2) and the description of the vision of Auroville in *A Dream* (Appendix 1). For this reason, it can be assumed that education in Auroville is actively working towards this intention! At the same time, it can be seen that humanity is so used to the forces of social reproduction that it can be extremely challenging to let go of that which we know as education, to be able to move beyond, creating a new educational system through which the human potential is truly unlocked, to enable the building of sustainable societies (Ahmed, 2010). Where is Auroville at in this junction between its intention and the reality? Is Auroville education actually serving its purpose? I use both a question mark and an exclamation mark when posing this question/statement. To understand the reality, the educational foundations, challenges and opportunities in Auroville can be discussed in this chapter.

- 1) The first research question: *How do Auroville schools define Integral Education?* explores how education in Auroville serves the evolution of consciousness. Three main themes emerged through the analysis: Individual Consciousness, Collective Consciousness and Structures/Systems/Practices.

None of the schools defined Integral Education in relation to its purpose of human transformation in a global sense, as defined in the summary of Sri Aurobindo's educational agenda (White, 2007, p.126-127). The purpose of education being that individuals become more and more aware of themselves, to expand into a collective and global evolution on both individual and social levels (Aurobindo, 1977). What struck me deeply through the interviews was the disconnect between this deeper

purpose of education in Auroville, to prepare young people with an evolving global consciousness, and the reality. Through the interviews, it became apparent that many of the schools struggle to deepen in understanding and practices of Integral Education. The concepts of Integral Education are so new and unexplored, that teachers themselves have not yet experienced that which is the foundation of this new educational approach. Auroville can also seem to have become a closed bubble, with little connection to the educational movement in the world. Known concepts in transformational and critical education theory such as “consciousness” and “freedom” in education are difficult for Auroville teachers to grasp, and much less form educational practices around. And with the disconnect from the larger purpose Integral Education has to serve globally, these terms can seem to lose their significance.

Can it be expected that teachers, many new to teaching, and most without training, and just beginning to become more aware of their own consciousness, should be able to, without full community support, make shifts from a mindset of education teaching subject content to an education serving the evolution of consciousness? Is it reasonable to expect teachers to transform education without collective efforts to understand the core aims and concepts of Integral Education? As explained by Searle (2000), scientists have until recently had resistance to, and therefore avoided the study of consciousness because of its intangible nature. If the area of study is still so new in the field of science, how can teachers be expected to pull this one step further. To create a new way of education for the evolution of human consciousness, this first needs to be studied in depth. Consciousness is something that cannot be taught, but only experienced, as expressed by one of the teachers and also supported in the literature (Aurobindo, 1977; Freire, 2000; Satprem, 2008; Zeman, 2001). This again puts teachers in the crossing between the old and the new, where it is clear that methods of content teaching will not serve the development of the faculties of consciousness, and therefore present-day mainstream education cannot be used for this purpose.

When it comes to both individual and collective consciousness, as shared by Ulyens & Ylimaki (2015), it is essential to rethink practices, educational organization, and teaching methods. Only a new educational design can serve a radical transformation of society. Education needs to support young people by providing the freedom and opportunity to transcend existing social constructs through their education itself. If the individual is formed by its culture, culture needs to be consciously created in the field of education. Here again most of the Auroville schools are functioning based on the structures and systems of mainstream education. There were very few links given between practices, the design of the schools, and the work towards human unity and sustainable development. Education in Auroville seemed in this way largely disconnected from serving the evolution of consciousness. Kenny (2022), shared that educational reform will go through different stages, and each school within a community will have very different perspectives based on their history, and the individuals within it. At the same time everyone in Auroville has joined for a specific purpose, particularly those who have chosen to participate in the creation of Auroville through the field of education. Here it is not only about the teacher’s individual journey of consciousness, but how to bring this to the children as well. A need was expressed to examine what we are doing in the schools and why, and to see what has shaped each school to what it has become, and critically question this to see if it is serving the purpose of an Integral Education.

To understand how to design an education towards human unity, Nordgren, (2017) explains that in order to try to understand diversity, acknowledging the differences is not enough, there needs to be an understanding of the narratives of these differences and how they influence our identification as cultural subjects. It is this exact opportunity, to widen a diversity of narratives influenced from all around the planet, that makes Auroville the living laboratory to realise unity in diversity. The question to the schools was to see how this is used from an educational perspective. This work is essential, because diversity without working towards unity leads to fracturing. This is what can be observed between schools in Auroville today, serving the opposite of what it was created to work towards in the Auroville context. Education needs to work for the co-existence of unity and diversity in balance with each other. To find this balance the foundations need to be put in place through which learning can happen (Nordgren, 2017). This seems to be a big gap in present Auroville education, that needs to be looked at and addressed.

Something that is at the core of both education for human unity and for education for a sustainable development is to make children agents of change. As shared by Nordgren (2017) young people growing up with an education that widens their world-views can make themselves agents of change, taking charge of their lives and becoming responsible and independent in forming their futures. Human unity requires an education where the human identity is built through an understanding of the present through its history. Through such an education children can grow up learning to think critically and build the complex understanding needed in multicultural society. Some schools have developed practices that support this through the study of history, understanding the world through its past-present-future perspectives and also relating it to the context of Auroville. Another example is the self-driven education and participatory decision making that has been developed in one of the schools. As described by Wilder (2021), being a part of decision making allows children to develop a shared sense of belonging, purpose, and responsibility that can support building a more human world. When children learn that their voice is heard and respected by adults, they become more comfortable to express their opinions and to disagree or question authority (Wilder, 2021). This work is also supported by Jickling & Wals (2008), who describe the importance of students becoming critically aware of how they perceive the world by engaging actively in decision-making processes as a part of their educational program. This supports students to understand and experience that they can transform the world they live in. This way of working also finds support in the foundations of sustainability education, and how to develop the competencies needed in the context of wicked problems. Informal educational settings that provide a transdisciplinary exploration require children to seek critical information, be innovative, and learn to observe where change is needed - and through this kind of work the wellbeing of the planet is at the centre of all decisions made (Macintyre et al, 2018; Wals & Benavot, 2017). Consensus based decision making has been used to connect children through for example The Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments in India, to work with areas like domestic violence or child trafficking, supporting children to organise and address their needs (Wilder, 2021). This kind of work is being practiced around the world, and there are many examples that Auroville education could take inspiration from to introduce this in the schools.

Regarding education for sustainable development, only one of the schools based its program around this. There was little knowledge of this and many teachers had not heard of the concept. The schools saw education for sustainable development as

something happening in Auroville in general, not in the school's program. Yet something stood out in the field of environmental consciousness, which deserves to be shared deeper:

From all the teachers it was inspiring to hear how care for the environment is something so culturally embedded in Auroville that children grow up deeply connected to it in their inner nature and values. When reflecting on this, it brings back the importance of narratives. The land in Auroville has a story that is touching and inspiring and magical. A barren desert plateau, deforested during times of colonialism for timber, then grazed bare by goats from small village settlements in the area (Thomas & Thomas, 2013). After the invitation to create Auroville, pioneers healed the eroded earth by planting and caring for about 3 million trees since then (numbers approximate from Auroville foresters). Today a lush tropical evergreen forest covers the area. The magic is that nature came back, through that care, and today wildlife has found its way back to live in these forests, deer, wild cats, porcupines, and many other mammals, all kinds of birds, reptiles and insects (Wrey, 2012). In Auroville consciousness is manifested in nature, and there is a collective consciousness that has grown from this. This is what the teachers see reflected in the children of Auroville.

Evidence in research supports this observation, stating that when the connection between learners and nature is strong, and also in the community where they are rooted, this supports the development of a sustainability consciousness. This offers opportunity to create personal and emotional connections to nature through lived experiences and hands on participation, through a place-based education (Wals & Benavot, 2017).

Sustainable development needs to be looked at in three areas, environmental, social and economic. Environment includes more areas than forests, in the context of building a city of the future it includes town-planning, construction, resource management, waste-management, renewable energy, transport, food etc, that all have impacts on the environment. In the field of economy there is a need to create a flow of resources, and build an economy acting from a perspective of degrowth (D'Alisa, et.al. 2015; Raworth, 2017). Social aspects come back to the previous section on human unity, to build a just and fair world. (D'Alisa, et.al. 2015; Raworth, 2017). This also includes discovering new ways of organisation and decision-making that is participatory and non-hierarchical. Education for sustainable development should in the context of Auroville see how it can allow children to grow into agents of change using global concepts of understanding the relationship between past, present and future.

In the future it could be imagined that Auroville as a whole could grow to have the same collective consciousness in all areas of life as it now has shown in relation to its nature for children growing up in this environment. When this kind of intrinsic value has been cultivated, it can transform individuals to act and work for change (Savelyeva & Douglas, 2016). Then perhaps the concept of school would no longer be needed, and life and the consciousness held within would be the example Auroville aims to show the world. From what can be observed from the example of nature, is that this collective consciousness takes generations to build.

Summary

Although Auroville schools use common terminology when describing what Integral Education means to them, there is not a shared way of applying it in neither theory nor practice. Terminology and practices are defined in a 'surface' manner, described more as a 'child centred' approach to education than an education to serve the evolution of individual, collective and universal consciousness. It can be observed that children growing up in Auroville have developed a collective consciousness in relation to nature, but this is not linked to practices in the schools but to Auroville.

2. The second research question: What are the challenges and opportunities for teachers/schools in Auroville? explores present realities in education in Auroville. Three main themes emerged through the analysis: Education in Auroville today and Resistance to change.

For the schools organised around a mainstream structure and functioning, limitations were expressed in several areas. As these schools follow subject teaching, the priority for teachers is to get better at teaching their subjects as well as with classroom management. More experienced teachers need to support other teachers in these aspects, instead of being able to deepen their practices. There was a divide between the teachers in several school, and because of this schools reached compromises in how to work to meet the needs of all the individual teachers. The teachers expressed that if these teachers who at present have less interest in Integral Education could be exposed to its ideas in an experiential way, they may become curious, which could help to create a movement of change in the schools. As shared by Savelyeva & Douglas (2016), if some steps were taken to help these individuals to understand the aims of a new education, it could bring curiosity and courage to experiment with implementation methods. Teachers could be made more aware that the children/youth developing a deeper consciousness towards sustainability and human unity is directly linked to their intrinsic values. If teachers become more conscious of this connection, it could lead to a transformation of the learning opportunities they would offer their students, and how such an immersion could become a continuous and holistic within the school.

Another area of interest to discuss and analyse further is the cultural complexity that many teachers described. With the multicultural diversity in Auroville, parents are formed by diverse cultural backgrounds, resulting in pulls in different directions for their children's education. This is an ongoing challenge for the schools. What were described were three groups of parents:

- Many children born in Auroville are of mixed nationalities, but with their roots now being in India. There is a duality for these children, who don't belong in India because by Indians they are considered tourists, because of the light skin, and visa status. These are children who belong to Auroville, yet in a larger context don't belong anywhere. Of the children of parents who have grown up in Auroville, many look towards a stability and accountability in education, perhaps because of the lack of belonging anywhere outside of Auroville, and not knowing where life will take their children.

- In contrast to this, many schools face the challenges with children of families who joined Auroville from the surrounding local villages. There are strong influences and pressure from the extended family who are very present in everyday lives. This impacts the choices that parents make for their children, like exam pressure, and many local parents actually sending their children out of Auroville for their education. Religious holidays and traditions are also very present as they are expected by extended family to continue to take part in this. These families have one foot in Auroville and one foot outside.
- The group of parents who are most open to new ways of education are those who have left their previous life in India or are from countries around the world, and have moved to Auroville consciously to break old patterns. These parents are more open to alternative ways and experimentation in education. Of these parents some come with the expectations that Integral Education should be more fully established in Auroville already, and can face disappointment that education is not so different from the outside world.

Several teachers shared that this is an issue, and does not just impact those directly struggling with this reality in their lives, but by the ripples this has on everyone in Auroville it creates a cultural divide. For those who have moved to Auroville from other parts of India or from around the world, the step in separating from their culture has already been made clear to their families, and distance may make it easier to break patterns. These trends are visible in all the schools in Auroville, reflected in different ways. This phenomenon can be discussed through the psychoanalytical process as described by Armoda (2022), addressing each of the parent groups separately to understand.

Firstly, within each category of parents there would need to be a process to engage with trying to understand and communicate around the subject of change, being a paradigm shift in education as well as the parent's relationship to it.

Secondly, is for parents to understand the challenges of communicating around something that is new, unexplored and where terminology to describe this education are still difficult to define or perhaps still remain undefined. This will bring the parents to need to step out of their comfort zone, to accept the gaps and silences that exist, understanding that these are a part of the process of a paradigm shift.

The third step in working with the parents would be for them to understand their subjective view of reality only depicts the fraction that they can observe, and does not show what is real, which would also include a synthesis of the perspectives the child, of teachers, and of other influences in society as a whole.

The fourth step is addressing what the parents carry with them from their own conditioning, and what they are projecting on their child and on education based on this. To observe fears in relation to their truth, and share the impacts this had on them in form of painful, embarrassing, or in other ways wounding experiences.

The fifth and last step of the work with the parents, according to (Armoda, 2022) would be to acknowledge the incompleteness of both parents and teachers, to show how both challenges and limitations are individual, and to begin a conscious and open

process for each one to free themselves of inner and outer limitations, and accept the real as different from each one's reality.

Although parents need support from the wider community of Auroville to move past their own barriers and be open towards an education of transformation for their children, the fact that they have all come to Auroville for this purpose, despite their personal limitations, is an immense opportunity for education in Auroville to become the living laboratory it is intended to be.

Summary

The main challenges for teachers in Auroville schools is to move away from a settled space that has become a comfort zone for both teachers and parents, to take part in a more active journey of experimentation, discovery, and manifestation of new ways of education.

Parents need support in a process to better understand themselves, and the education they have also come to Auroville to serve, as parents, and to work on themselves to be ready for the journey it could take them on. Today the schools are deeply impacted by the way parents are disconnected from their role in the education of their children, and their support and trust in the school's process is needed for the schools to move forward and deepen their work.

3. The third research question: Can teachers and parents become agents of transformational leadership through education? explores moving towards a paradigm shift in education. Two main themes emerged through the analysis: Confirming the role of education in Auroville and Transformational leadership.

Auroville is the ideal place for teachers and parents to become agents of transformational leadership in education, and a paradigm shift in education is dependent on them. As the opportunity is offered to create something new, from the bottom up, without hindrance of government guidelines, curriculums, or policies, the possibilities are open. This makes Auroville unique in the area of educational research, with possibilities of participatory and action research, by designing, conducting and presenting ethnographic research in a living laboratory.

To answer the question if teachers and parents can take on a more pro-active transformational educational leadership to become true agents of change, it needs to be understood if the conditions needed for this in Auroville are already in place, and if not, what in the present is still lacking to enable it.

In support of parents and teachers as leaders for this transformation, it can be acknowledged that each and every individual living in Auroville has made the active choice to dedicate their life to be a part of this experiment. This setting can, with the right support for parents and teachers to become open to change, take leaps forward in the field of education. One of the schools described a whole school research project done over a year, that had great impacts on both understanding theory and putting new practices in place. If this could be extended to all Auroville schools, it could have the potential to start a snowball effect of educational transformation.

Relating back to the introduction and background chapters of this paper, and the global crisis left to the children of the world to solve, as Greta Thunberg expressed it, “the house is on fire”! here I question if a safe middle ground and staying in comfort zones have their place in Auroville, or if education here needs to actively contribute towards being the living laboratory for the world in the field of education that it was intended to be. I believe education has such a central place in the Auroville Charter (Appendix 2) and the Dream (Appendix 1) for a reason, and the task to recognise this is not for individual teachers, but for schools and for the Auroville community as a whole.

Holding back the possibility of transformational leadership, it could be seen that many of the schools have settled in a comfortable middle ground, and found systems and routines that work to keep a diverse teacher team and parents in harmony. Then, schools are not looking to deepen collectively to change overall ways of working, and leave it up to individual teachers to deepen as they wish, while staying within the overall school framework. Very few schools gave concrete examples of practices and areas they were deepening in, or described implementation practices. It can be seen that there is a need in society to be in a safe middle ground between reproducing past methods and stepping into the unknown (Ahmed, 2010). Because there are these different areas of concern to take into account, transformational leadership is not an easy task and will have its shortcomings. Berkovich (2016) points out that it is easy to abandon such leadership when it meets resistance, but this cannot be avoided. With persistence and an awareness of the challenges that come with transformational leadership, it can help bring forward qualities needed for change within both organisations and society as a whole (Berkovich, 2016; Sharma, 2017). Even when people of goodwill agree on a direction to follow, it is very challenging to translate ideas into implementable action. The view of education is often idealistic, and education is seen as the tool to shape the future. Yet educational systems have not lived up to this, and instead make visible the great divides that exist in society (Ahmed, 2010). As Young (2013) writes, education is all about change, about changes in knowledge, understanding, attitudes and beliefs, as well as skills and behaviours. Then transformational leadership in principle is more closely linked to pro-activity and change than what innovation on an organizational level is.

There were several examples of existing practices in Auroville schools that could be an example for others to take inspiration from, and to get support from teachers who already have experience with implementation in various fields of study. Enough different practices were shared to start to develop a content of what could begin to form first steps towards what an Integral Education could include and build upon. This common ground could help building a common educational culture to be known also outside of Auroville, so that Auroville can begin to be recognised and identified by its educational practices.

These examples of educational practices moved beyond the traditional subject teaching, working to build knowledge that is more real, pluralistic, multicultural, and transdisciplinary. The kind of deep knowledge that is described as powerful knowledge, helping to better understand and explain the world. It works through a collective consciousness, as it moves beyond disciplinary boundaries. This can be seen as multicultural education, taking a global perspective to cross and overcome real and imagined cultural divisions. This builds intercultural competence, which is based on knowledge of both social and cultural processes. It gives students the ability to

interpret representations from different cultures, and to learn to relook at and re-evaluate one's own values, beliefs and behaviours. The ability to recontextualise reality in an ongoing process allows the mental faculties to expand, and it is essential to perceive and understand reality to be able to transform it (Freire, 2000; Nordgren, 2017). The concepts based on this that are practiced in some of the Auroville schools could be adapted to many other contexts and areas of study.

An important reality to mention, is that for many teachers in Auroville financial challenges is an ongoing issue, which was mentioned in many of the interviews. Most of the teachers working in Auroville schools receive an Auroville maintenance, a small monthly amount of money that does not cover basic living costs, especially for families, or for those who still need to keep a connection with family living in other parts of the world. Many of the teachers have several jobs to make ends meet, are stretched to their limits, and the capacity for innovation and creativity, especially when it takes time, energy and sometimes even resistance becomes limited.

Teachers expressed a need for professional development, common for all schools, and serving to build both a teacher community to share and learn together, as well as to counter the present divide that exists between schools. There was a need for this training to be experiential, not theoretical. If a new education requires competencies like collaboration, systems thinking or self-awareness, it can only be developed through a paradigm shift within the training of the teachers themselves, looking at education in Auroville as a whole, as individual schools, as well as the teachers within them, allowing for new values to root themselves in its structures at every level (McLaren, 2015, Strakova & Cimermanova, 2018; White, 2007). What was very interesting was that when teachers were asked what area was the most important, and should be included in the first professional development session, many schools shared the same: Courage. They wanted to experience courage, together, with all the schools, and all the teachers.

Summary

This summarizes the answer to the third research question. Teachers and parents can become agents of transformational leadership through education, through COURAGE. When choosing to be a part of the work with education in Auroville, the larger purpose of this education needs to be very present, with a global perspective. Those choosing to be a part of this experiment need to find the courage to be the living experiment that is intended in Auroville. I would like to relate this back to Mirra Alfassa, founder of Auroville, who said: "I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville is not coming to an easy life; it means coming to a gigantic effort to progress" (Auroville website, n.d.).

Implications

The study could have practical implications on the development and deepening of Integral Education in Auroville. It helps to identify needs of development and best practices, as well as open up conversations on a subject that many today feel insecure when addressing. It is hoped that this study will provide a roadmap for successful next steps in a more radical transformational educational leadership in the field of Integral Education in Auroville, through collaboration, sharing, transformative leadership, openness to experiment, and connection with the outside world.

Most of all, I hope the findings of this research study will plant seeds of thought leading to new questions, for those interested to look critically at and follow up through deeper research in the different areas that emerged.

Conclusion

As I demonstrated in the introduction of this thesis, this study is a highly personal one. I have been deeply involved with education in Auroville for many years, feeling the possibilities itching in my fingertips, yet experiencing such a distance between the role education should serve in Auroville, (in the aspect of Auroville as a living laboratory for educational research) and the everyday realities.

My own life journey has given me a lot of experience in the field of education. I can compare my own education as a child growing up in Auroville, with the education of my own children in Auroville. I can compare my work as a teacher in Auroville schools with my work as a teacher in mainstream education in Sweden. I can compare my work with school development in Auroville with the work I did with school development in Sweden, and I can compare my experience working with teacher training in Auroville with my work with teacher's training in India and Sweden.

It is being in this space of comparison that has led me to this study. I feel that over the years I have not seen much change, not within educational transformation in Auroville itself, and instead of being at the forefront of this work as a living laboratory, there is a global movement of change that I experience, in which Auroville is lagging behind. Currently, there is a lot happening in the world to support a transformation in education, and Auroville is not a part of any of these forums. The third point of the Auroville Charter states that: "Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations" (Appendix 2). I think it is essential to discuss what this means in regards to education in Auroville, as Auroville is not intended to be an isolated from the world, but rather in constant interaction with it to grow the global consciousness described by Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo, 1977).

This led me to the topic of this study, Education serving the evolution of consciousness?! Through an interview study with teachers from all the Auroville schools I wanted to understand the definition of Integral Education that their school was serving and founding their work upon. From that base I attempted to capture the challenges holding back transformation as well as the opportunities for deepening.

Answering the research questions I asked at the start of this thesis, clear answers emerged. It can be observed that the role society plays in education is essential, as

radical transformation of the educational system needs to happen not just in the context of school and teachers, but the Auroville community as a whole needs to become supportive of change, including the parents. Concrete examples of this became visible both through the literature study, as well as through the interviews with the Auroville teachers. There is a need to connect more deeply to Auroville's intention as a living laboratory – through an openness to learn, curiosity to try, and acceptance of the ups and downs that the journey will take. There is a need expressed for guidance and support in form of training, forums for sharing, peer support and research. Most schools lack deeper connection with both theory and practices, and professional development of teachers is needed, and an internal process of personal growth needs to be supported for parents.

In this matrix I have attempted to keep my voice silent in this paper, simply as a researcher in Education for Sustainable Development, to try to understand the reality without my own tampering with it. I find myself with a dual identity, both as an insider and an outsider in the process.

As an insider the strength has been my understanding of Auroville, its schools as well as a sense of trust between myself and the interviewees. As Auroville is a small community we know each other well, which allowed for an openness in the conversations, and a natural flow through the interview questions, adapting easily to each teacher and school. The same aspect could be a weakness of this thesis. Had the same study been done by another researcher without this personal connection to Auroville, the outcomes may have been very different.

As an outsider in this study a great strength that I discovered was my ability to observe the schools in a new, unconditioned lens, that I had never done before. I learnt a lot from this experience, about my own assumptions that I had to put to the side as a researcher. It gave me an opportunity to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers and parents. Looking through a lens of Critical Theory allowed me to get a new insight of underlying structures and unconscious behaviours in schools, teachers and parents, uncovering social behaviours that had not been visible before, or perhaps not articulated.

Through this study several critical themes emerged for further research. Some were mentioned by teachers and have been shared in the Results Presentation. Others came to me as I found answers to the research questions in this study, new gaps were identified that need to be delved into further. I am personally interested to further my research after this study, to better understand how the realisation of the vision of Auroville is linked to the educational philosophy of Integral Education, and if this truly could be a direction to follow in pursuit of a radical shift towards a new paradigm of education, for sustainable development and human unity on Earth.

This paper does not want to state any definitive truths but rather identify areas to work on, making both strengths and weaknesses that exist in Auroville education today visible. The intention is not to put anyone down, but to raise that which can support Auroville education as a whole. To light a spark of interest and curiosity of what could actually be done in Auroville through a conscious, collective effort.

“Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out” (Swami Vivekananda, Ashrama, 1981, p.55).

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Appendix 1

A Dream

“There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities.

Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position.

For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one’s living but a way to express oneself and to develop one’s capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual’s subsistence and sphere of action.

In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realize such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it nor the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream. Yet, this dream is on the way of becoming a reality. That is exactly what we are doing on a small scale, in proportion to our modest means. The achievement is indeed far from being perfect, it is progressive; little by little we advance towards our goal, which, we hope, one day we shall be able to hold before the world as a practical and effective means of coming out of the present chaos in order to be born into a more true, more harmonious new life” (Auroville website, n.d.).

Appendix 2

Auroville Charter

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

Appendix 3

Semi-structured interview questions

Research Question 1: How do Auroville schools define (Integral) Education? Education serving the evolution of consciousness

- What is your understanding of Integral Education?
- How is this seen in your school? Is there a shared vision?
- In relation to how Integral Education is understood in your school, what pedagogical/methodical/systemic frameworks do you have in your school to support this?
- How is the understanding of Integral education enacted in your school's everyday practices?
- How are the three principles of Integral Education present in the practices in your school?
- Share about the work with the different parts of the being in your school - vital, physical, mental, spiritual and psychic - give examples.
- When we look at an education that moves from teaching of content towards the development of consciousness, how is this understood and reflected in the program offered?
- Why do you think we speak so little of Integral Education in Auroville?
- What is the link between the vision of Auroville and the practice of Integral Education? In areas like Integral Yoga, Human Unity, Unending Education?
- What future support would be useful to support a deepened understanding and practice of Integral Education in your school?

Research question 2: What are the challenges and opportunities for teachers/schools in Auroville? Present realities

The cultural subject's role in education for human unity

- What can support the deepening of the work with Integral Education? If we look at concepts like "Human Unity" that we are striving towards, could education in Auroville be organized in a different way to better support this?
- How do you think we are influenced by our cultural background in the decisions we take in regards to the values we want education to foster?
- In Auroville we have a mix of cultural differences, with people carrying their own educational experiences/traumas from their own lives. How does this reflect in the school's ability to create an Auroville culture in the field of education?
- How can we break personal patterns of conditioning that we carry that limit our understanding/ability to change?

- What cultural influences are present in your school?
- Do these influences support the work, or hinder it? Can you give examples?
- What do you think is the relationship between the individual and collective cultures in regards to educational change? Are there things in your school that hold back change because of this? How does this relate to Human Unity?
- Now we have created a separation between those living and working in Auroville who have access to Auroville schools, and for others there are outreach schools. This could be seen as quite an exclusive and separating system, where education is usually inclusive and embraces diversity. What are your thoughts on this present separation of the Auroville and outreach schools?
- What is the motivation between how parents choose schools for their children?
- How much understanding do parents have of Integral Education? Is alignment between school and home important? What work is done in this area by the school?
- Is language a barrier when creating an Auroville culture?
- Now we can see that each Auroville school has its own “culture”. Can we instead move towards an Auroville culture nurturing human unity? How would we do that?
- Do you feel that there is a need to build a common educational culture in Auroville?
- If so, what do you see is needed in the next steps to work towards building such a common Auroville culture around what work with Human Unity through Integral Education is in theory/practice?

Education reflected in individual action for sustainable development

- With the climate crisis that youth growing up today will face and have to deal with, how is eco-pedagogy reflected in Integral Education?
- Is Integral Education human-centric or eco-centric or both? Explain how you see this in your school. How does it reflect in practices?
- What does consciousness mean in areas of individual, collective, and environmental consciousness and how is this reflected in your present practices?
- What does consciousness mean in areas of individual, collective, and environmental consciousness and how is this reflected in the present practices in your school?
- Is Integral Education human-centric or eco-centric or both? Explain how you see this in your school.
- What is your understanding of eco-pedagogy/education for sustainable development?
- How is this practiced in your school?

Resistance to change

- How does our cultural backgrounds/conditioning impact our ability to be open to change?
- What are the main fears faced by teachers? Parents? in Auroville schools today? How are these visible? Give examples.
- How are these fears visible in the school? Practices?
- What blocks deepening/research/ new discoveries/new practices in your school?

- What is needed to overcome this?
- Is there an ability/interest to deepen and change practices as understanding grows? Give examples
- Has this changed over time? If so, how?
- How do we build trust when stepping into the unknown? Give examples from your work/school.
- What is the differences in alternative education practices and transformational educational practices?
- How is this difference visible in Auroville schools? Give examples from your school.
- Is it possible to hold onto the old systems and still transform education? How does this reflect when relating to educational practices in Integral Education. Give examples.
- Is it possible to build trust in transformational education without finding a common foundation of what Integral Education is in Auroville/Outreach schools?
- Is it possible get accreditation/recognition for Auroville education without finding a common foundation of what Integral Education is in Auroville/Outreach schools? (examples Green school Bali/Sudbury schools/Ashram school other)
- What future support would be useful to support to overcome resistance and fear of change in your school?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about on this topic?

Research question 3: Can teachers and parents become agents of transformational leadership through education? Towards a paradigm shift in education

- What is the differences in alternative education practices and transformational educational practices?
- How is this difference visible in Auroville schools? Give examples from your school.
- Is it possible to hold onto the old systems and still transform education? How does this reflect when relating to educational practices in Integral Education. Give examples.
- The stronger the educational culture becomes in Auroville, the closer we will also come to being recognised for what such an education is toward the world. Do you think that is important? (For example, in comparison with other schools who have established themselves to be recognised and acknowledged for their culture, ashram school, Green School Bali, Sudbury schools, Ashram school, etc).
- Is it possible get accreditation/recognition for Auroville education without finding a common foundation of what Integral Education is in Auroville/Outreach schools? (examples Green School Bali/Sudbury schools/Ashram school other).

Transformational educational leadership

- What does the work with transforming education look like in your school? Give examples.
- What is the background of the teachers in your school? How do they join? How many have a formal teacher training or background in educational work prior to joining?
- What are your expectations of teachers who join and how is this supported/followed up?
- What is the role of teachers/parents/students in transforming education in your school?
- How is this done in practice?
- What are the challenges you face?
- Are you working on something to strengthen this work? If so, what?
- Could work with “teachers training” help to strengthen the practices in the schools? What would this look like to meet the existing needs?
- What role do parents have in the role of Integral Education?
- Now education in Auroville looks different in each school, and we also have Auroville and Outreach schools.
- What are your thoughts about how to work towards Auroville education being recognized as being Auroville education towards the world?
- How is the choice of living in Auroville linked to parents wanting an Integral Education for their children? We see many parents putting their children in schools outside Auroville today. Why do you think there is a gap that makes these parents leave? What is needed to change this in an Auroville perspective?
- What future support would be useful to support a transformational educational leadership in your school?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about on this topic?