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## **Nubri Kindergarten Teacher Training Report** **December 2019 to February 2021**

Abiding Heart Education has been supporting the Samagaun and Prok Kindergartens in Nubri since 2018. A bespoke training programme was created to meet the unique needs of teaching in the high Himalayas and training young teachers with no teaching experience. The focus of the training is to build their capacity as individuals and, at the same time, train them as teachers. Abiding Heart trainers have decades of experience in training teachers in the Himalayan region and the programme for Nubri is a reflection of the knowledge and understanding required to train teachers in this region. In addition to our training courses, we provide ongoing mentoring, consultancy and curricular content throughout the year.

The Nubri teachers have been making wonderful progress in their training and are gradually beginning to gain the capacities and confidence they require to teach in the challenging environment of the high Himalayas. However, there is still some way to go in their being able to apply what they learn independently. We are confident that this will come with time as they continue to participate in our training courses and our trainers continue to spend time mentoring them in their kindergartens up in the mountains. We are very proud of what they have achieved so far and maintain close contact with them through WhatsApp and Zoom. The teachers regularly send wonderful photos and videos from their classrooms and their work with the children.

Training this wonderful group of young teachers is not only about providing wholesome and culturally relevant education but also about providing a nurturing space for them to grow as young adults who are trying to find their place and purpose in the world. It is the hope and wish of all of us at Abiding Heart that with the knowledge, care and support the Nubri teachers receive from us they will, in the future, be able to teach other teachers in their region.

In this report we begin by providing a brief history of the Nubri kindergarten schools and then we share with you details of the training we have done with the Nubri teachers since December 2019. We describe how we have adapted to the challenging world of the Covid-19 pandemic while still providing high-quality teacher training where it is most needed.

### **Background to the Nubri Kindergarten teacher training project**

In early 2018, the Sama teachers travelled to Kathmandu and spent 18 months training with Bina Gurung in her Montessori kindergarten. They also spent a further two months in China receiving training at a Chinese Montessori kindergarten. They then returned to Samagaun and began teaching in the newly set up kindergarten school.

In August 2019 we welcomed new trainees who were destined to teach at the Prok Kindergarten. The Prok teacher trainees received an initial one-month training at Abiding Heart Education centre in Kathmandu with Dr Meyrav Mor, Chandra Tamang and Ramila Rai, and then spent two months training at the Tashi Waldorf School with Chandra Tamang and Kripa Rana. In the meantime,

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Abiding Heart advised on setting up the kindergarten school, which opened in October 2019, and also made donations for purchasing toys and educational resources.

In November 2019 Chandra Tamang travelled to Nubri and spent one-month training the Nubri teachers in the Samagaun and Prok kindergartens. The help of a dedicated and experienced trainer proved to be extremely valuable in supporting the trainee teachers to apply the knowledge they had gained in their classrooms. This in-school training greatly facilitated the smooth and successful setting up and running of the education programme in Nubri.

### **December 2019 - February 2020**

#### **Winter Residency 2019-2020**

**Dates and duration:** 7 December 2019 - 14 February 2020: 8 weeks of full-time training with one week's break. Total hours: 280

**Location:** Abiding Heart Education Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Trainers:** Dr Meyrav Mor, Chandra Tamang, Kripa Rana, Kate Bryant, Swaembhu Shakya, Sangita Shakya, Ramila Rai, Kunsang Palmo, Khenpo Pema

**Trainees:** 9 Nubri kindergarten teachers from Samagaun and Prok villages

#### **Course content:**

This intensive full-time course consisted of 35 hours of classes a week covering a wide range of subjects:

- Educational theory and psychology: Attachment Theory and Child development: development of self
- Lesson planning and assessment (writing end-of-year reports)
- Implementation of the curriculum:
  - Circle time, Storytelling, Rhythm of the day, week and year.
  - Teaching numeracy and literacy
- Shamatha meditation
- Learning to make class resources
  - Puppetry: making stand up puppets and practicing a puppet show
  - Toymaking: knitting and sewing soft toys
- Arts and Crafts activities: Learning to teach watercolour painting and crafts activities
- Holistic Kindergarten design: Creating the kindergarten environment and designing a playground

In the **Abiding Heart 2020 Newsletter**, you will find some lovely photos of the trainees engaging in different activities on the Campus during this residency.



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### March - June 2020

When the training finished, the trainees returned to the Nubri region and arrived just before the national lockdown decreed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant the Nubri kindergarten schools were closed until May when they were able to reopen.

Between **May and September 2020**, Dr Meyrav Mor **mentored** the trainees regularly using WhatsApp messages and calls, as this was the most efficient way of communicating given the lack of stable internet coverage in the mountains. During this period, she also provided **consultancy on classroom design** and the **design and construction of the playground** at Samagaun. As we reported in our **2020 Newsletter**, the children of Samagaun village have a lovely new school playground thanks to Khenpo Urgyen, the director of Tergar Charities, who implemented the playground design and supervised the construction.

The innovative and flexible nature of the **bespoke teacher training for the Nubri teachers** means that the trainees receive both training specifically designed for their situation and classroom needs, and they also attend courses forming part of Abiding Heart's teacher training, allowing them to broaden their knowledge base of educational theory, psychology and practice.

### July - September 2020

The **Child Development** course forms part of the kindergarten and primary teacher training Diploma. In response to the global pandemic this course was offered **online** and, given its groundbreaking integration of Buddhist human development, Developmental science and the Steinerian perspective of the nature of the human being, it was opened to the public.

The Nubri teachers were invited to attend and simultaneous translation into Nepali was kindly provided by Rashi KC (Principal of Tsoknyi Gechak School) for the first 2-week module. This module was obligatory for all attendees as it explored the key concepts underpinning all seven modules.

#### **Child Development from Birth to Rebirth**

**Dates and duration:** 5 July 2020 - 4 September 2020 with a weekend intensive in November: 9 weeks of full-time training and one weekend. Total hours: 196 hours

**Location:** Online

**Lecturers:** Ven Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, Dr Meyrav Mor, Dr Robert Roeser, Lucila Machado

**Guest lecturers:** Marjorie Theyer, Kathy MacFarlane, Dr Matthieu Ricard, Dr Richard Davidson, Dr Susan Davidson, Dr Tawni Tidwell and Shani Lev

**Arts:** Kristin Powers, Swaembhu Shakya, Sangita Shakya and Marianna Buakho

**Trainees:** 6 kindergarten teachers from Samagaun attended as they have a stronger internet connection than Prok village. All Nubri trainees had access to the Nepali translation recordings of Module 1 to refer back to. The Nubri trainees attended many sessions across all modules (barring internet outages) and showed great interest.

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**Course content:**

**Module 1:** The Intersection of Buddhism, Developmental Science and Holistic Perspectives on Human Development

**Module 2:** Early Childhood: Birth to Age 7

**Module 3:** Middle Childhood: Age 7 to 14

**Module 4:** Adolescence: Age 14 to 21

**Module 5:** Adult Development: Lifespan phases from 21 to old age

**Module 6:** From the Bardos of Death through Prenatal Development to the Moment of Birth

**Module 7:** Child Development, Biography Work and the Buddhist View

For more information regarding the content of the above modules please click [here](#)

**October - November 2020**

In October the Nubri trainees received a course in teaching English as a second language. This course was specifically tailored to their needs and those of the children.

**Teaching English as a Second Language**

**Dates and duration:** October 2020 (4 Sundays); 12 hours

**Location:** Online

**Trainer:** Dr Meyrav Mor

**Trainees:** 7 Nubri kindergarten teachers from Samagaun and Prok villages

**Course content:**

The course began with an introduction to teaching in a bilingual and a tri-lingual classroom. Meyrav and the trainees reflected on the challenges the trainees experience in their classrooms in implementing such a programme, and on how they learnt various languages when they were growing up. We also explored the impact of poor language instruction on acquisition of language and how this affects the ability to have a strong command of one language by the time they reach adulthood.

Meyrav and the trainees worked together to build a daily and weekly bilingual programme, with clearly defined times throughout the school day for teaching the additional language (English) and for strengthening the foundation for the children's mother tongue (Tibetan).

The trainees learned useful methods for presenting and practising English naturally in the classroom:

- Individual/small group learning with a focus on comprehension and speaking. This involved gradually building up a relevant range of vocabulary and learning to speak natural English in short sentences.

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- Whole class learning includes using objects, visuals, prompts, body language, storytelling, puppetry, songs and verses to increase the children's vocabulary and expose them to longer sentences.
- Key in teaching an additional language is showing the children how to learn with a partner and in groups by actively communicating in the language they are learning.

The Nubri teachers kept in touch with us while they were implementing the content of this training in their classrooms and together we continued to fine tune the language programme. We are happy to report that the implementation has been successful and the children have been picking up English quite quickly to the delight of the teachers and the parents.

In the Winter residency (see details below) we spent parts of blocks 1, 3 and 4 focusing on teaching English as an additional language in kindergarten. We continued the training on how to teach spoken English and also how to introduce basic English literacy skills. It was heartening to get enthusiastic feedback from the Nubri teachers that they now feel their confidence is growing in knowing how to teach the children. One of our trainers will visit them this coming spring to continue helping with the language teaching implementation and other areas of the curriculum.

### **Working with Parents**

In November, Khenpo Urygen requested some practical training on working with parents and this was organised in two stages:

1. As an introduction to the parenting classes, Mingyur Rinpoche and Tsoknyi Rinpoche recorded messages and teachings for the parents that spoke more generally of how to raise children.
2. After this, Meyrav Mor and Khenpo Sonam filmed two short videos for the parents explaining the content of the education programme the kindergarten children are receiving and the English language programme that is being implemented in the schools.

### **November 2020 - February 2021**

The **Learning Theories** course forms part of the full-time kindergarten and primary teacher training Diploma and is also open to the public, and again the Nubri teachers were invited to attend. We were fortunate that Pragalbha Basnyet, our talented estate manager, could translate the classes to Nepali making them even more accessible. In total, over 30 students from Nepal, India and Bhutan attended.

### **Learning Theories**

**Dates and duration:** 24th November - 10th December 2020 (and not in October as we reported in the 2020 Newsletter): 20 hours.

**Location:** Online

**Trainer:** Dr Meyrav Mor, Khenpo Sonam Tsewang, Bina Gurung

**Trainees:** Seven trainees from the Nubri region and one Tergar monk from Bhutan were joined by teachers from Tsoknyi Gechak School, and from other schools, as well as parents.

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### **Content:**

This course presented Buddhist learning and teaching methodologies, Steinerian learning and teaching approaches, and contemporary learning theories thus providing the theoretical complement to the more practically focussed 2020-2021 Winter Residency that followed two weeks later.

Dr Meyrav Mor led the students on the journey through the various contemporary learning theories from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to Pestalozzi, Froebel, John Dewey, and Krishna Murti, to name a few, followed by Steiner's transformational learning approach and more recent theories, such as multiple intelligences. Bina Gurung introduced a fascinating overview of the Montessori approach to learning.

We were reminded that "the aim of education is to educate the child towards inner freedom, that is, liberation" while Khenpo Sonam Tsewang emphasized that inner freedom rests on the two principles of *prajna*, discriminating awareness, and *karuna*, a sense of concern for others, which is compassion.

As the pandemic continued, this year's **Winter Residency** was moved online. At this point, Meyrav and the trainers were well accustomed to the online format and through the medium of live online video streaming, they were able to create a strong sense of community and lively interactions among the students, using the breakout rooms and whole group gatherings.

### **Winter Residency 2020 - 2021**

**Dates and duration:** 27 December 2020 to 5 February 2021, 6-week training, 20 hours/week.

Total hours: 120

**Location:** Online

**Trainers:** Dr Meyrav Mor, Bina Gurung, Nima Sherpa, Lisa Bono, Paulina Bemporad, Kate Bryant, Tsunma Kunsang Palmo, Nima Sherpa, Swaembhu and Sangita Shakya, Ramila Rai, Kalu Rai, Pragalbha Basnyet (Nepali interpreter)

**Trainees:** Eight trainees from the Nubri region were joined by teachers from Tsoknyi Gechak School, Shechen Gompa School, and Thrangu Tara Gompa.

### **Content:**

We had a wonderful range of Waldorf, Montessori and Bank Street trainers and Pragalbha Basnyet translated from English to Nepali making the content eloquently accessible to the students with his superb translation. Tsunma Kunsang Palmo gave an hour's meditation class every day, following Mingyur Rinpoche's Joy of Living Programme. Swaembhu and Sangita Shakya gracefully taught Charya movements and Ramila Rai and Kalu Rai taught the trainees to make handmade woollen toys, cloth puppets and bamboo toys.



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The daily programme included: meditation, lectures, and arts, crafts and Charya classes. The course was structured in 5 blocks:

- **Block 1:** 2 weeks: Teachers: Meyrav, Bina, Nima  
Literacy: beginning of writing and reading
- **Block 2:** 1 week: Teachers: Meyrav, Bina, Nima  
Numeracy: numbers, grouping, sorting, shapes and size
- **Block 3:** 1 week: Teachers: Meyrav,  
Teaching English as an additional language with a focus on speaking
- **Block 4:** 1 week: Teachers: Meyrav and Lisa  
Storytelling and simple puppetry; Circle time and Green Tara morning puja; sewing a Green Tara
- **Block 5:** 1 week: Teachers: Meyrav  
Rhythm of the day, week, year; crafts activities with children; and working with parents

Students responded enthusiastically, engaging in all the activities throughout the six weeks and are already asking when the next training course can be offered!

### **Nubri Kindergarten training plan: 2021 - 2022**

Each year Abiding Heart creates a training programme specifically designed for the Nubri teachers which includes:

- **Winter and Summer residencies:** these two courses offer 12 weeks of intensive teacher training in Kathmandu and comprise the Himalayan part-time teacher training.
- **Spring and Autumn** training in Nubri schools: 8 weeks of in-school training specifically designed for Nubri teachers.
- **Short courses:** these usually take place in Autumn and some are open to the public. Learning Theories (2 weeks) runs every year and in addition there is at least one other course. In October 2020, we ran a one-week course on teaching English as a second language tailored specifically for the Nubri teachers.
- **Mentorship:** the Nubri trainees can contact Meyrav and other Abiding Heart trainers on specific issues as needed (eg, classroom management or teaching a specific subject) or generally on how to teach. The young teachers are good at staying in touch with us and they also send photos and videos of their activities. This ongoing contact means we can prepare specific training sessions relating to their requests.
- **Consultancy and advisory** for the Nubri Kindergartens: this is provided on demand and, as detailed above, can include a wide range of areas, from designing a playground, to working with parents and transitioning children to primary.
- **NEW: monthly lesson-planning** sessions starting March 12th, 2021, which will greatly help the Nubri teachers to apply what they have learnt.

The school year commences on March 14th, 2021, and this year we have added monthly lesson-planning sessions with one of our trainers to their training programme. This will help them to implement step-by-step what they have been learning in the training courses throughout the year.

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Taking part in the Winter and Summer residencies enables the Nubri teachers to interact with teachers from other schools in Nepal and to build a sense of community. They can share and exchange ideas with other teachers and are able to understand the different realities in other schools. This exposure to a peer group and being able to learn from the experience of others builds up their confidence and pride as teachers. They recognise that even though they work and live in a very remote part of Nepal they are not isolated and that they form part of an education community that cares about the work they do.

Pandemic permitting, in 2021 our trainers will travel to Nubri and spend a month in the spring and a month in the autumn offering in-school training and mentoring in the Samagaun and Prok kindergartens.

We hope this report has provided insight into the depth and reach of both the Nubri teaching programme and how it is complemented by the broader Himalayan Teacher Training offering. As always, we are indebted to your ongoing generosity in supporting this unique teacher training programme.