



Institute of Sathya Sai Education Australia

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Toogoolawa Schools: A Real Education Revolution for the Future.

The system of education proposed by Sathya Sai Baba is called 'Educare' which means to 'bring forth from within'. It rests on the essential truth taught by all of the great religions, sages and philosophers that supreme love and wisdom lies waiting within each and every person. As such, children require an educational environment in which these innate qualities can be manifested. Sai Baba likens these hidden qualities to fire that is latent within wood, requiring the unburnt log to be placed next to burning embers for its own heat and warmth to be brought forth. That is, the child's true human virtues can only become part of his living personality when he is in the company of adults who are serving as upright role models for the five universal Human Values of Love (Prema), Truth (Sathya), Peace (Shanti) and Non-violence (Ahimsa). In every school throughout the world the teachers have a vital role to play in guiding the children in their care to become the noble human beings they are meant to be.

In 1992 a millionaire named John Fitzgerald enlisted the help of Suwanti and Ron Farmer to set up a charity called 'Toogoolawa' which is an Aboriginal word meaning 'A place in the heart'. Now there are three Toogoolawa Schools in Australia for teenage boys whose behaviour excludes them from mainstream schooling. Our teaching staff are all committed to becoming heroic examples of the five Human Values in action.

The Toogoolawa story illustrates that the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and the other spiritual giants of history like Jesus Christ, Mahatma Buddha, Ramakrishna, Eckart Tolle and Saint Francis of Assisi can be integrated into a school curriculum with powerful results. Education lacking a moral compass can be held responsible throughout the world for the many intractable and dangerous problems confronting the world today. On the other hand, we see in the results with our students in Toogoolawa Schools that when the educational environment is saturated with the universal philosophy of Educare and its practical applications, even those students who seemed destined for a life of mental illness or anti-social and criminal behaviour can be given a second chance to find their true self-confidence and goodness, showing as an enhanced ability to concentrate and learn, respect for elders and responsibility towards society.

It is not necessary that teachers who wish to apply Educare become followers of Sathya Sai Baba, nor even to be overtly spiritual. All that is required is that they be totally committed to their own on-going personal transformation to become ideal role models for the five Human Values. In the Toogoolawa Schools there are no photos of Sai Baba, nor is His name mentioned to the students at any time. We believe that the Educare philosophy is totally inclusive, allowing for all religions, esoteric mysticism and even atheism and agnosticism, provided the teacher believes in the essential goodness of all humanity and creation. Such an all-inclusive spiritual foundation for the education of the young is eminently suitable for the multicultural society of Australia.

In all three Toogoolawa Schools (in Ormeau, QLD; Newcastle, NSW; and Hastings, VIC) the aim is to saturate the whole physical and academic environment with reminders, signposts and catalysts for assisting and guiding the students into manifesting their innate noble virtues. Wise sayings adorn the walls in every room, sacred rituals and prayers are part of the everyday routine; moral stories, service to the needy, organic gardening and literacy studies based on good character are part of the curriculum; and mindfulness meditation is practised at least six times every day.

Each school day begins with a student kneeling in front of an altar, lighting candles and repeating, “As we light these flame we also light the flames of Love, Truth, Peace, Right Conduct and Non-violence which lie within us all”. Then the assembly pronounces, “We start the day with love. We fill the day with love. We end the day with love. This is the way we live”. A long session of meditation follows.

On Monday mornings a ‘Thought-for-the-Week’ is presented and discussed with the students (e.g. “Love all. Serve all”, or “Help ever. Hurt never, and so on), after which a moral story illustrating the wise saying is shared with the group. At the end of the half-hour Quiet-Time at the start of each school day the students and staff recite aloud an affirmation derived from the Thought-for-the-Week (e.g. “ Today I will do my best to always be helpful and never do or say anything hurtful”).

There are many more sacred rituals, prayers and mindfulness practices throughout each school day. These can be explored on our website at www.toogoolawa.com.au and by reading the book about Toogoolawa titled ‘Love Changes Everything’ by Dr Ron Farmer, available through the website.

You might wonder how it is that boys aged 10 to 14 years who have been excluded, expelled or suspended multiple times from mainstream schools can find themselves actively involved without coercion in such spiritually-inclined procedures. We believe that it is because the hand of the Divine imbues each of our Schools with an irresistible sacredness calling the Soul of each student and teacher to re-unite with Itself.

Our three Schools provide a place of respite and healing for our boys for periods of a few weeks up to two years or more – ‘respite’ from their years of feeling unloved and inadequate, and ‘healing’ of the emotional scars which have been inflicted upon them in their early years. When they first enrol with us, ninety percent function well below their mainstream peers in literacy and numeracy; seventy percent or more come to us with a long history of truancy, hiding away from an educational system which has allowed hope and love of learning in the young child to die. Our mission is to re-ignite the flames of hope and aspiration in each one of them, and our considerable success in this endeavour is, we believe, mostly because of our system of schooling that has evolved out of the spiritual-educational philosophy of Sathya Sai Baba.

If a group of wild, angry, authority-hating, hyperactive bullies can profit from what happens in our Toogoolawa Schools, just think what could happen if mainstream schools across Australia were to embrace the principles of Educare in a fearless and full-hearted way. And it must come. We must trust in the words of Sathya Sai Baba when He said, “It is not in the nature of Avatars to fail.” He said that every human being is an avatar – we are sleeping giants, kings and queens who have forgotten our royal heritage. Let us dare to take the lead.

We have the tools, the ingredients for a radicalisation of education. Let us bring Educare alive so that others are inspired to follow our example.