



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 16



Welcome to Issue No. 16

It seems a long time since July and a lot has happened in the School over the past months.

Following very popular and happy residential weeks during June and July, there is a short film of the week which took place in Brisbane - see below in Top Tips. **Go to [Schoolinsight](#) to watch the film.**

Then in August, the School Leaders from around the world had a 2-week conference at Waterperry House near Oxford. **Go to [InsightGallery](#) to see photos of this very successful conference.**

I hope you will enjoy reading the articles here. With very best wishes.

[Christine Lambie](#), editor



Sanskrit has been studied for many years in the School as a direct means to understand advaita philosophy more fully. Warwick is one of the people who has contributed to a coherent system for this enriching study. He studied both at Oxford (BA) and The School of Oriental and African Studies in London (MA and MPhil).

The Power of Sanskrit Warwick Jessup, London

Looking back, I can now see that throughout my childhood Sanskrit was not far away. At school I was introduced to many of the philosophical ideas from the East. One teacher learnt some Sanskrit and held lessons before school. I learnt the Sanskrit alphabet while waiting to bat in cricket matches.

In my teens I was introduced to a translation of the Gita, and was very intrigued. At about this time I started to attend a philosophy group. On one occasion we were exploring the nature of sound and spent over an hour refining our pronunciation of the Sanskrit syllable Om. This was my first experience of the power of sound, and one I shall never forget.

University

At around age 15 or 16, in the late 1970s, I heard what Maharaja Shri Shantananda Saraswati said about the study of Sanskrit, and its importance. My mind was made up to study this at University.

I was lucky enough to be accepted at Balliol College, Oxford, to study for a BA in Sanskrit. I was given a room directly beneath the rooms of the Boden Professor of Sanskrit, who was extremely affable. I learnt a lot from him during the three years. The Oxford libraries were replete with fascinating volumes and manuscripts, and lecturers from all over the world would fly in to present on their speciality. In this way I was fortunate to gain a rounded view of the vast riches of Sanskrit literature.

After my MA course and a couple of long summers spent with pundits in India, I began to specialize in Advaita Vedanta, translating and writing notes on a Sanskrit commentary on the Svetasvatara Upanishad. This work was attributed to Shankara, and had not previously been translated. It amounted to over 300 pages, the typing of which was devotedly carried out by my mother. With this study I received a wonderful initial education in Advaita Vedanta, for which I have ever since been extremely grateful.

Teaching

In 1987 I was asked to teach full-time at St James in London and to help establish Sanskrit as a school subject. A team of us have been at work on this now for a number of decades. Textbooks have been written and tested in the classroom over a long period; these are now gradually being published. Several other schools are now showing great interest. We teach Sanskrit from ages 4 - 18, and some of our students go on to study Sanskrit at University. My dear wife Elena also completed a Masters degree in Sanskrit a few years ago. Contrary to popular rumour, we do not speak in Sanskrit at home - at least, not normally.

Sound and meaning

Sanskrit appears to have been formulated by people of extraordinary insight over many generations, dating back to 1500BC. The design of the language is such that its sound, when it is properly pronounced, frees up the being. With children, I have found it is helpful to begin every lesson with recitation of Sanskrit texts. It never fails to clarify the atmosphere and children love the sound of the language.

But the importance of this language is not just its sound. Every word is full of spiritual significance, which can be accessed by studying the root and the affixes that go to make up any word. In this way one reaches deeper levels of understanding, and can tune into the wisdom of the authors of the language. Even a little contact with this spiritual significance is precious. It is a divine influence which seems to give access to a greater intelligence.

Sanskrit and Meditation

I have found that, alongside meditation, Sanskrit has been the most profound influence in my life. The philosophy of Advaita or 'not two' is expressed in the Sanskrit language and depends on Sanskrit texts, especially the Upanisads. Studying these, it has become clear to me that an English translation is only a pale reflection of the original Sanskrit. I feel that to understand the essence of Advaita, Sanskrit is essential. The refined knowledge accessed through Sanskrit goes hand in hand with refined meditation.

Sanskrit can be daunting at first. When I first came to it as a teenager I felt some apprehension, and had to work through it. For those coming to Sanskrit in later life, it can appear very challenging, yet I have seen many older people take to Sanskrit with transformative effect. I encourage people to sit Sanskrit exams, as this overcomes inertia.

I have recently been translating another work attributed to Shankara called Tattvopadesha: 'The Teaching of Reality'. The only time I find for such projects is when on holiday, so much of this translation work has so far been done in Tenerife, though, I hasten to add, not on the beach! This work does not appear to have been translated before into English; it is most enlightening to translate a text from scratch, because you have to rise to the level of the author. In this case, it is a tall order.

Vision

It seems to me that if Sanskrit was accepted widely in the West as Greek and Latin have been, it would have a remarkable effect on our civilization. I sense that this is becoming ever more possible, as people turn to eastern wisdom through yoga and meditation. I feel blessed to have come across the Sanskrit language and to have had the opportunity to keep company with it.



Top Tips

Items recommended by readers

Brisbane film. Sam Grace (student in Brisbane) made this 11-minute film of the School's residential week held there earlier this summer from July 21 -28. Go to [Schoolinsight](#) to watch it. Highly recommended.

2. 'If I can' App. This free app, the brain child of Paul Palmarozza (student in London), gives daily aspirations based on Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If' and Bhagavad Gita ch. 16. Go to [ifican](#) and subscribe.

Ted prize winner, Jose Antonio Abreu is the charismatic founder of a youth orchestra system that has transformed thousands of children's lives in Venezuela. Here he shares his amazing story with footage of the young musicians. Worth

watching to the end if you can find 19 minutes. Go to [JAAbreu](#).

4. [Rijksmuseum](#) Watch this 2 minute modern adaptation of Rembrandt's painting "The Night Watch", for the re-opening of the famous gallery in Amsterdam – flash mob with a difference. Just for fun, go to [Rijksmuseum](#)



In 2007 in Pretoria, Kate started work as a cleaner at Avlock, a company engineering riveting systems. There she met William Wooldridge who leads the School branch in Pretoria. Because her two children were at the local primary school, she became involved in improvements to the school, as a service to the community.

Incredible Journey

Kate Ntuli, Gauteng, South Africa

I left school early; I was doing matric but never sat my final exams because of the war that broke out in 1995 that left us and most of the families in our neighbourhood homeless. I regret never having completed my formal education, but it is my intention one day to do this. I was employed on a part-time basis at various retail operations and I had also done some domestic work.

Smile on my face

When I went to Avlock International, my duties initially involved the cleaning of the offices and filling in for the tea lady when she was not available. I was always intent on doing the best I can, no matter what work

was assigned to me and it is in my nature that I am an enthusiastic person. Because of this, I tend to work with a smile on my face.

After five months or so working as a cleaner, I was assigned to very basic clerical duties such as faxing, photocopying and filing. Although I had not finished school, I always thought it important to polish my language skills and to learn to speak English as fluently as possible. After a further two months of clerical work, I applied for the position of receptionist at Avlock and after some very basic training, I was duly appointed.

Soon afterwards, I learnt that there was a Development Forum for young people at our company facilitated by the CEO, Mr William Wooldridge. When I learnt that I could join the programme, I was more than eager! In the Forum, each individual member was asked to take on some form of community duty and to report back each week on progress.

Community Duty

Because I had two children at the local primary school and the school was in a mess, I decided that this would be my project. After some discussion with Mr William, it was agreed that I would attempt to form a School Governing Body. The existing SGB was completely dysfunctional and had not had met for the past 18 months. In order to assist me with this task, I was co-opted to the Board of Governors at St. James (in Johannesburg) to be trained and gain some direct experience in running an SGB.

At the same time, I joined the School of Practical Philosophy in Benoni. With the knowledge that I gained from St. James, and also on the Development Forum at work, I soon was able to re-constitute the SGB at the local primary school and to arrange its first meeting.

Chaos at local primary school

At this first meeting, it became clear to me that the school was bankrupt and that the state funding which was allocated for the management of the school was being grossly abused. A senior official of the school was engaged in various fraudulent activities, including hiring the school facilities for her own benefit as well as authorizing illegal payments from the school coffers to herself.

All this was happening during a severe winter where the school had no power because it had not paid its utilities account for the past 6 months. So the youngest children in the school, including my own children, were made to sit on a cold cement floor without desks or chairs. Chaos reigned everywhere: the school had no perimeter fencing and vagrants walked freely in and out of the premises, sometimes abusing the children. The school had no library for the children, the playground equipment was derelict and the teachers did as they pleased, showing no inclination towards the care and education of the children. I discovered to my horror that there were children up to age 11 unable to read or write and that there was no formal reading scheme.

Starting work

I had to take on various tasks simultaneously. I went to the government Department to bring a case against the official with proof of the fraudulent cheques she had authorized to herself. This became a long and protracted battle with the Department which eventually resulted in her removal after a period of 18 months. During this time, the school was virtually leaderless.

I saw the need to raise funds urgently. So I contacted a local radio station which arranged a donation of R250,000 through the Dischem Foundation, a major retailer in South Africa. We used this money for a new school library, for desks and chairs for the Grade R children. We also raised funds to erect a perimeter fence.

Getting on an even keel

After some dispute with the Department, we finally interviewed and agreed on a suitable head teacher, Mr Singh. St. James School in London gave us their reading scheme, and Paul Moss from St James London visited the school. There was also an offer of teacher-training from the School of Practical Philosophy in Gauteng.

The school is now more or less on an even keel and the general situation at the school is vastly improved. I am still a member of the School Governing Body, although I am no longer the chairperson, as the

constitution precludes me from this role since my children are not at the school.

Making a difference

I was recently promoted again at work and I am now front office manager and in charge of Corporate Social Responsibility. I am very grateful for the way things have turned out for me at work. I must stress that I could never have done any of this completely on my own and I am deeply grateful for the support I received at my own workplace and also for the guidance and direction from the School of Practical Philosophy.

What seems clear to me now in hindsight, is that I could never have imagined the scale of this project. And if I had known what lay ahead and the obstacles to be overcome, I might never have had the courage to begin. But I took it on wholeheartedly with a sense of complete faith. It was incredible how the forces in creation somehow arose to provide the people, the resources and the guidance that were needed to fulfil the intention.

It has been an incredible journey for me, a journey of inspiration, dogged determination and ultimately fulfilment. Beyond everything, I am most grateful that I was able to make a difference in the lives of the children at the local primary school.



The School is awarded a prize

In August, the School was presented with the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative Award.

The photo shows the founder of GCGI, Professor Mofid, presenting the award to the School at the annual Gala dinner in Paris on 27th August 2013.

Mr Ian Mason, Principal of the School in London, received the award on behalf of the School.

The award reads:

The Award is given in recognition of the School's extraordinary and tireless work, offering a truly meaningful education for the common good and selfless service in helping to build a better world. The School has shown that an education based on ancient wisdom can raise the individual to a higher level of awareness, bringing deeper understanding and kinship with all living things.

The GCGI is an international think tank with a vision that positions the quest for economic and social justice, peace and ecological sustainability within the framework of a spiritual consciousness and a practice of open-heartedness, generosity and caring for others, by encouraging us all to know and to serve the common good.

To find out more go to [GCCG](http://GCCG.org)

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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