

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

Taktse International School
PO Box 90, Gangtok
Sikkim, India 737101
www.taktse.org

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New Science Labs for Taktse

by Ms. Pujamani Pradhan, Science Teacher

In the winter of 2016, Mr. Ganesh, the science team coordinator, took me on a tour of the Taktse campus. As a newly hired science teacher, I was shy, nervous and somewhat apprehensive about what lay in store. My misgivings increased tenfold when we arrived at the science lab – just one room that was serving as a

common area for biology, physics and chemistry. In one corner, students were scrutinizing something under a microscope. In another corner, students were building circuits with wires and batteries. And in a third corner, students were huddled around a whiteboard. The room was a cacophony of students chattering and teachers loudly trying to communicate the lessons. Despite the challenges of teaching in this chaotic situation, the spirit of the teachers and the eagerness of the students to learn were apparent.

After the tour, Mr. Ganesh made a surprise announcement. The physics teacher, Ms. Samiksha, the biology teacher, Mr. Parash, and I were assigned to prepare a blueprint for the science labs in the massive new building then under construction beside the original school building. Although this was an exciting prospect and a rare opportunity, I was apprehensive. I had never designed a lab before, even though I had worked in many. Would I be able to shoulder such a big responsibility?

That night I connected my laptop to the internet and googled, “Designing a chemistry lab for a school.” Thousands of results appeared, and I was off and running with my new project!

Next morning, the design team visited the construction site, walking around protruding iron rods and piles of gravel. We contemplated the location, structure and orientation of the future labs. Every afternoon after that, I sat in my corner of the resource room and brainstormed to create an achievable plan, discussing and taking feedback from Mr. Ganesh and the other science teachers. It took me a month and all my free time to lay out a suitable floor plan, select equipment, and list all the essential lab apparatus such as beakers, flasks, pipettes, and burettes – all the while keeping

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Thank you to Mr. Namgyal, and to all
who contributed to this newsletter!



safety in mind, and adhering to the [Cambridge guidelines](#).

Right after summer break, it was time for me to stand before the team and present my plan. I was weary from all the work and over-thinking, and nervous about how my plan would be received. After I ended with a “thank you,” Mr. Ganesh flashed a wide smile and exclaimed, “Good job, Ms. Pujamani!” I heaved a sigh of relief and gave myself an imaginary pat on the back. It was a moment of pride and satisfaction. I couldn’t believe I had done it.

A few weeks later, Mr. Sunny, the estate manager, started working on a replica of the floor plan, while Mr. Pratap in the administration office compared bids and purchased the necessary apparatus and chemicals from different vendors across Kolkata.

A year later, in the winter of 2017, the magnificent new building, which is twice the size of the old building, was ready for use. On the first day of the new school year, excited and curious faculty members toured the new facilities. We started on the ground floor, which housed a large cafeteria for teachers and students. As I climbed up the stairs, I saw subject-oriented classrooms for business, accounting, economics, history, literature and geography, and there were separate, newly furnished classrooms for each grade. A new computer lab was also set up with brand new systems. As for me, my heart jumped with pride when I saw how my hard work had been transformed into a brand new chemistry laboratory, with glass apparatus, modern equipment, and multi-colored bottles of chemicals arranged in perfect order in a wooden cupboard.

Our strenuous efforts had finally paid off, and I couldn’t wait for the learning adventures to begin in our spacious new facilities. This will be a tremendous improvement over the way classes had previously been crammed into different corners of a room, and far more conducive for teaching and learning.





A message
of gratitude to all
the generous donors
who made our beautiful
new building possible.

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[HERE](#)





In May 2018, Sagun Limbu and Simrin Tamhane became the first graduates of Taktse International School to graduate from college.

To my dear Taktse community,

I safely reached Bangalore without getting as sick on the plane as I normally do. My cousins came to pick me up at the airport and ever since landing, my family has been feeding me well! It's really satisfying to eat home food, especially the fermented pickle my grandmother makes with tamarillos. My taste buds had been itching for it!

Bangalore is hot & humid during the day but I love the city in early mornings and evenings. Maybe it's the people in the city or maybe it's just me post graduation, but I feel calm, relaxed and happy here.



The days leading up to graduation and the day after were hectic, exciting, confusing and exhausting. I feel like I did not get time to soak everything in, make sense of my emotions, or the upcoming transition. Most importantly, I was not able to thank each one of you properly. Now that I am back in India, and have had some time to reflect on the past four years, I feel tremendous gratitude and I am humbled by your generous support and compassion towards me.

Endicott College helped me grow emotionally and academically. I am so thankful for the experiences it has given me. I am most proud of the independence that I have grown to love. Of course, there were tough moments too. If it weren't for your love and encouragement, I wouldn't have had the courage to come this far.

It meant a lot to me that so many friends and supporters came to our graduation and the party afterwards. Thank you for celebrating this milestone with us! I am grateful for your thoughtful gifts and well wishes for the future. Standing in a circle in Ms. Debbie Hilbert's home and raising toasts, I became emotional because I felt so privileged to be part of your lives.

I am excited to see where life takes me in the following years and what part of the world I may end up in. I will keep you updated about my next endeavors and hopefully I will come visit you again for graduate school.

Until then, I will keep you in my thoughts and will try to lead my life with as much selflessness as you have shown me in the last four years and for some of you, ever since I met you for the first time at Taktse!!

With Love, Sagun Limbu, Taktse '14





The Very Wiggly Tooth

by Reshma Thapa

Bunu's loose tooth refuses to come out! After the advice from her parents and her sister fails to do the trick, she gets a little help from a Himalayan folktale.

Children everywhere can relate to [The Very Wiggly Tooth](#), but it connects especially well with Asian readers.

The Very Wiggly Tooth illustrated by Canato Jimo, written by Reshma Thapa Gurung, published by Pratham Books (© Pratham Books, 2018) under a CC BY 4.0 license on StoryWeaver. Read, create and translate stories for free on www.storyweaver.org.in



The Truth about the Tooth

by Maria Lauenstein-Denjongpa

All Tashi's aging mother wants is a memento from Sarnath, the land of the Buddha's first teachings. But year after year, on his travels to Benares, her son forgets to bring something back for her.

One year, having forgotten again, Tashi picks up an old tooth on the way home and presents it to his mother as the Buddha's tooth.

Maria Lauenstein Denjongpa retells this Tibetan folktale with remarkable insight, while Chetan Sharma's illustrations capture the beauty of Kalimpong. [The Truth about the Tooth](#) is a magnificent story about the power of love and faith.



The idea for my digital picture book, *The Very Wiggly Tooth*, bubbled up when my 6-year-old niece struggled with her first loose tooth. As I watched her run from one adult to another, asking for suggestions to make it fall out quickly, I knew I had to write her story! That was in 2013.

For years before that, Ms. Maria Denjongpa and I had sought children's books featuring characters from the Himalayas as a means of boosting our students' identity and self-esteem. We wanted such books for the Taktse library, but the more we searched, the more distressed we were to find that none existed. The storybooks and textbooks I read growing up all had blonde, blue-eyed characters with names that sounded nothing like ours. The way these characters talked, the games they played, the food they ate and the houses they lived in were far removed from the reality around us. We decided that it was time to write these books ourselves!

Ms. Denjongpa led the way with her first picture book, *Miss Lee and the Mosquito*, followed by many others. Over the years, she kept writing, and she kept pushing me to get started. I was inspired by her published books and felt strongly about the cause, but I kept procrastinating. I was afraid that I would not be able to write an engaging story, that I would be rejected by publishers, and that I just did not have it in me. Then came my niece and her loose tooth!

The Very Wiggly Tooth came to fruition after multiple drafts. Every year for three years, I visited the publisher's office in Delhi with my manuscript, trying to convince them to take it on. Every year I was sent back with instructions to improve it. I would revise it and return the next year with renewed hope, only to be sent back with yet more instructions. I was beginning to think my story held no value and that I should give up trying to publish it. Then Ms. Mathangi Subramanian, the editor at [Pratham Books](#), came to my rescue. She saw value in my story, and helped me improve it. Thanks to her, we now have a children's book in our library about Bunu and the Himalayan tradition of giving your loose tooth to a mouse. My hope is that more books come out of Taktse about the people of this special corner of the world.





The Birth of Dharma Curriculum

by Ms. Dawa Dingtsa

Last summer, when I went to United States for professional development, I worked on the Dharma curriculum with Mrs. Maria Denjongpa. Taktse has an

optional dharma classes for grades 1 – 8 but we needed clear goals and well thought out lesson plans. Until then we had been teaching the students how to read Tibetan so they could read Buddhist texts but the kids were not really engaged. We knew we were not on the right track in terms of the students' understanding of the teachings of Buddha and Guru Rinpoche, or how dharma relates to our lives. So we started by brainstorming goals and principles, keeping in mind the vision Dodrupchen Rinpoche bestowed while talking to us about dharma class several years ago. We came up with these four goals: cultivate mindfulness, cultivate kindness and empathy, know and understand Buddha and Guru Rinpoche's teachings, and inculcate a sense of connection with nature and all living beings.

Every morning, we transformed the kitchen into our classroom. The kitchen table became our desk. I made a huge chart by taping together two flip charts and took out our best pen to scribble our thoughts. Mrs. Denjongpa used her laptop to search for resources and ideas for developing activities to connect with the goals. For example, to connect with the goal of empathy, we came up with a writing assignment where students imagine being an animal. We also thought of the traditional act of Tsi-tar (releasing chickens, fish, and other animals which would otherwise be killed and eaten).



For teaching mindfulness, we found a book called [Anh's Anger](#), and developed an activity for kids to learn how to watch their minds. Mrs. Denjongpa and I made a mindfulness jar filled with water and glitter. The glitter represents thoughts. When feeling angry or upset, just shake the bottle. Thoughts swirl around like the glitter. and then calm down as the glitter settles.

We worked all day long, only breaking briefly for a cup of hot tea. Every sip helped us think deeper about our task. Then we started making lesson plans and activities for each grade.

Every other afternoon, we called Ms. Patricia Pederson, who visited Taktse last summer. She is a curriculum expert, and had a lot of ideas. For example, she suggested the Shel Silverstein book called [The Giving Tree](#) to teach compassion. We also used a storybook about Buddha currently being written by Mrs. Denjongpa. We came up with activities for every chapter, such as making illustrations, interviewing monks, going on field trips, and acting out passages from the book.

After I returned to Taktse and began to implement these ideas and activities in dharma class, I saw them come alive. It was exciting to work on them with Lopenla and other teachers. To see teachers

going to the dharma class prepared with goals and lesson plans was rewarding. Students getting excited about making their own glitter jars, and connecting the jar with their thoughts and feelings made all the work we did back in Beverly seem worthwhile. Some of them actually shared the glitter jar exercise with their parents and siblings at home. Learning how to watch their mind through many activities is far more engaging than just memorizing texts.



Body Tracing

by Mr. Phuntsog Namgyal

With the unfolding of a new school year, Ms. Kunzang and Ms. Smriti, kindergarten homeroom teachers, sat on the new grey carpet in the teachers' corner and began to discuss how to encourage their young explorers to know more about themselves and their peers. The theme for the lesson plan was "All about me."

An idea popped.

"The kindergarteners love being outdoors. Since the weather is so nice, we should do something outside."

"Let's do it, let's do it! Yes, let's take them outside."

With each question the teachers asked each other, a clearer picture of what they could do with the class began to emerge. These questions and ideas led to a very exciting Monday for the kindergarteners and their homeroom teachers.

A whirlwind of kindergarteners jostled out of their classroom and gathered around Ms. Smriti under the cherry blossoms in the lower courtyard. Ms. Peden, the kindergarten helper, gathered and assembled the resources needed for the activity. The excited students were barely able to stand in a straight line and started to tug on Ms. Smriti's long pink shawl. The students were divided into three groups led by Ms. Kunzang, Ms. Srijana and Ms. Smriti.

In small groups, students took turns laying on the ground, face up toward the sky, as their friends outlined each other with colored chalks. They started slowly from the head and proceeded down toward the legs.

When Kinsum cried out, "That's me, that's me" Ms. Kunzang was Impressed by her zeal, and became caught up in the activity. She asked Kinsum, as the first brave volunteer, if she could identify any of the parts of the body. Kinsum asked for a blue chalk, and in crooked handwriting she wrote, "stomach."

Slowly the tiny kindergarteners began collaborating to identify the different parts of the body using whatever knowledge they had. Then they would color them on the ground and label them. Not only had these explorers learned about colors and art, but this simple activity had also exposed them to science.

When the morning recess bell rang loudly, older students flocked down the stairs to grab their snacks and drinks. They noticed the kindergarteners' artwork and came over to see what they had done.

The school-wide morning tea recess became an opportunity for the kindergartners to exhibit their work. Students from different grades huddled under the cherry trees and pulled their friends over to show them what the kindergarteners had done.

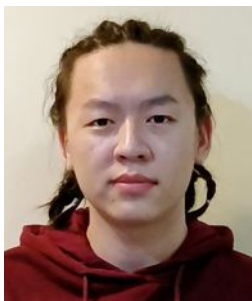
Tenzing Palmu ran to her older sibling and pulled him to her piece of art. As her older sibling admired her work she bloomed with a sense of pride and achievement. The other kindergarten students also dragged older students by their Taktse track pants to show them their sketches adorning the otherwise blank floor.

The next evening the rain washed away all traces of their work.



Essay assignment for admission to Endicott College:

J.T. Adams stated, "There are two types of education. One should teach you how to make a living and the other how to live." Describe what the above quote means to you and your expectations of your Endicott experience.



College Essay

by Jamyang Tamang, Taktse '18

My father was the first person from his village to finish Grade 10. His school life was challenging. He found little joy in the process of learning. Learning during those times was looked upon as a means to an end, an end which

meant a decent government job. Real education had almost no value. All that mattered were scores to qualify for a job. To him, learning meant following instructions, being obedient, standing up every time a teacher walked into a class, and memorizing multiplication tables and scientific facts without comprehension. Asking questions was taboo. His bitter experience caused him to shun the idea of learning for anything but the sole purpose of getting a job, an attitude which he later instilled in me.

But I was being educated at a school with a very different approach. At Taktse International School, learning goes beyond books and grades. It entails collaborative projects with peers and teachers, reading books, writing persuasive essays, asking questions, challenging convention, and even rappelling down a 200-foot rock face.

Taktse's approach to learning collided with the beliefs of my parents, who were skeptical of this new style of education. To my parents, education means competition. Competition means scoring higher than others, better

prospects, and ultimately a better job and future. According to this line of thinking, the field of science in my small world is generally associated with lucrative jobs.

In India, students must choose either humanities, science or commerce. So when, after being inspired by "The Wolf of Wall Street," I decided to study commerce, my parents were completely against it. They kept telling me what a struggle it would be to make a living having studied what I was passionate about. They compelled me to opt for science. This was against my school's culture of following one's passion. This was the first instance when the two bubbles I lived in collided with each other. Since then, I have had to balance these two educational philosophies, which together make me who I am today.

And they continue to collide. While one tells me to do what I feel passionate about, the other tells me to do what is practical and profitable. Thus I am challenged to find my own way forward.

To me, education is more than a degree. It is a lifelong process which involves connecting, reflecting and growing as a person. It is being able to connect with friends and adults and have meaningful conversations about sensitive issues. It is being able to raise my hand and speak up when something doesn't feel right. It is observing an experiment in motion, and wondering if a chemical equation represents something explosive or useful.

In the end I challenge the premise of the question. Education does not have to be binary. It can be both for a living and how to live. I will have both and be whole.

Jamyang Tamang was accepted at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts, and will start this fall.



Circle Meeting

by Ms. Malisha Chettri and Ms. Anugrah Rai

At 8:15 p.m., the teacher announced, "It's circle meeting time!" Their studies over for the day, students picked up their study area, the AV room, and the library and packed their bags. Then everyone gathered in the AV room and sat in a circle, chatting among themselves. One of the students, Tandin, clapped to get their attention. The murmuring continued. He clapped again, and everyone finally quieted down and looked at him. Tandin then said, "Tonight is my circle meeting and I would like to share a game called...."

Circle meeting is a half-hour session in the evening when the residence team, teachers and hostel students gather to share their passions and interests and build the confidence that comes from leading a group. It's also a time to bond as a community.

Circle meetings are held twice a week. Hostel students look forward to leading their own a circle meeting when their turns come around. Each student is scheduled in advance to lead some team building activity or share their interests, individually or in pairs. Sometimes circle meetings are also used as a time to discuss various issues that arise at the residence and come up with strategies to address these problems.

We feel that circle meetings are an important aspect of the holistic development of the students. It is a time to develop leadership skills while sharing, caring, respecting, listening, and bonding with each other as a community.

School days



Connecting with our community



Taktse Olympics 2018



Seeking Resource People for Academic Session 2019!

Our Resource People Program helps fulfill Taktse's [mission](#) by merging the Best of the East with the Best of the West, enriching the lives of resource people, students and Taktse faculty members alike.

Upper School (Grades 9 to 12)

We especially seek those with expertise in high school sciences such as biology, chemistry and physics. We also need humanities such as creative writing, history and poetry; business-related subjects such as economics and accounting; and math and computer science.

Lower and Middle School (KG to Grade 8)

Math, science, reading, leveled literacy intervention, literature circles and great books, project-based learning, classroom management, student counselors, and sports coaching.

Taktse is in session from February to December. Food and lodging are provided. Resource people typically stay at Taktse for at least six weeks, and sometimes considerably longer. For more info, see: www.taktsefellowship.org, or email Ms. Meenakshi Pradhan at meenakshi.pradhan@taktse.org.



Seeking Skype Tutors

Are you a high school teacher? Do you want to make a difference in the world?

We urgently need teachers to teach/tutor our 10, 11 and 12th graders over Skype. Following are the subjects in which we need help: biology, chemistry, physics, math, business studies, history, geography, literature, and computer science.

Class times can be flexible, according to the time difference. The number of classes (minimum of one per week) is flexible too.

If you are interested in volunteering or know a teacher, retiree or grad student who might be, please contact: Meenakshi Pradhan at: meenakshi.pradhan@taktse.org or Malisha Chhetri at: malisha.chhetri@taktse.org.



Seeking College Mentors

Are you interested in mentoring a Taktse student through the college application process? It involves bi-weekly Skype calls to help a student identify appropriate schools, negotiate the Common Application and financial aid process, and revise essays.

If so, please contact:

Professor Lisa Smulyan
Swarthmore College
610-328-8343
lsmulya1@swarthmore.edu

or Mr. Rinchen Pakhrin
Taktse International School
rinchen.pakhrin@taktse.org