

# Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

Taktse International School  
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### Chewang's Journey *by Phuntsog Namgyal*

It's a sunny, blue-sky winter morning. The mighty mountains beyond the foothills lift my spirits. In the shadow of those mountains, forty minute drive from school, lies a little hamlet by the name of Kabi Tingda. A couple dozen old brick houses dot a hillside laced with rushing streams, wild yellow orchids, and colorful Himalayan birds chirping in the lush green forest.

Kabi Tingda is home to Chewang Nedup Bhutia, who made his journey to Taktse as a first grader with a very humble background. I remember him on his first visit to school, a shy and nervous kid clutching his father's hand, unwilling to let go. Tucked behind his father's legs, he bobbed his head and smiled back at me and said hello in his native Bhutia language. During his initial days at school, he would be found crying in class or in the hostel, frustrated with his inability to express himself in English.

Chewang has made amazing progress over the past two years, overcoming tough challenges along the way. He has come out from being a shy and nervous kid, to a boy who loves to express himself during morning meetings, gives book talks during grade level assemblies, participates with confidence at the weekly house events, and competes to be the multiplication champ during Math icon time. Starting as a monolingual Bhutia-speaking child, Chewang is now a multi-lingual student who knows English, Nepali and Hindi.

Chewang is often seen in the library lost in the world of books. He is currently hooked on the Arthur series by Marc Brown. 'Arthur's First Sleepover' is his favourite. After classes, he loves playing football in the back field with his hostel buddy Palden. He lights up the field with his dribbling skills, and coaches and shares them with his friends.

Sometimes during recess Chewang runs up to me and proudly shows me his latest school work with stars awarded by his teacher. We smile at each other. At the end of the day, Chewang and Palden run up to me, give me a hug, and offer me their evening snack. As they hang onto my stretchy jacket, I dig into my pockets and pull out two candies. They grab them and dash back into the dining hall. Deep inside I am filled with joy and happiness. As a Buddhist, I feel that it must be our karmic connection that brought us together at Taktse.

As this school year comes to a close, Chewang gets ready to head back to Kabi Tingda and share his Taktse stories with his family. When he starts third grade next year, he will be ready to encounter literary dragons and elves, learn higher level multiplication, and acquire new football skills. Chewang is filled with excitement in his heart, carrying the dreams of his parents and the pride of his village on his shoulders.

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



*Chewang Nedup Bhutia (right) reading his favourite "Arthur" book*



## Professional Development at Taktse

*by Ms. Pujamani Pradhan, Grade 11 and 12 Chemistry Teacher*

Every Saturday, rain or shine, hot or cold, Taktse teachers make themselves comfortable on the grey carpet of the library ready to learn from each other in the professional development program. This is a unique opportunity, as such programs are not common at other Himalayan schools. It is here that teachers gain a deeper understanding of the mission and vision of the school, comprehend the distinctive features of the Cambridge program, bond with other faculty members, and discuss topics such as new pedagogies, conflict resolution and classroom management.

Professional development at Taktse has helped me immensely in my journey of three and a half years. Everyone supports each other by sharing their experiences and learning with an open mind. Taktse faculty who have attended professional enrichment programs in India and around the world, as well as resource people who volunteer at Taktse, share their knowledge and experience in these Saturday morning sessions. Looking back, I can see that these sessions have helped me grow and become a better teacher with each passing season.



One workshop conducted by Ms. Yolmo and Ms. Thapa (English literature and language teachers at Taktse) genuinely helped me to make my classes more engaging. They shared what they learned at a workshop they attended at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts called 'Writing across the Curriculum.' The workshop emphasized the value of including a short writing activity in every lesson to foster engagement and monitor comprehension.

I decided to try this out in my chemistry class. The following week, I gave my students a short writing activity on molecules. I moved around the class checking each student's writing for comprehension, answering their questions and providing writing suggestions. Incorporating a short writing exercise into each chemistry class has helped me monitor my students' understanding

of the subject matter, while also helping my students and myself to become better writers.

Another workshop on classroom management led by Dr. Patricia Pederson, a resource person from the Keystone School in San Antonio, Texas, also helped me improve my teaching style. She made me aware of how even small gestures and movements can help keep students' attention. She demonstrated various gestures and body language with impromptu role plays. Another tactic involved positioning oneself near students who often get distracted. These techniques have helped me become a more effective teacher.

Every Saturday I get a chance to learn something new at these professional development workshops. Being a teacher comes with great responsibility, but with responsibility also comes joy and pride in learning and teaching collectively. I feel delighted and motivated to shape young minds every day. As our director, Sonam Sir often says, "Being a teacher is a calling."







## Highlights of Bookaroo 2019

by Pema Choden Bhutia, Dean of Admin.

This year the trip to Bookaroo in Delhi was especially satisfying, in part because of the good bunch of students who went. The people at all the corporate offices we visited couldn't help themselves from praising our students. They were amazed at the thoughtfulness of the questions our students asked, and how well they behaved.

At one workshop, students had to write something on a topic given by an author, who offered a prize for the best composition. Three Taktse students, Riga Pelzom Yousal, Rinchin Wangmu and Zeldhen Ugyen Chuki, and one local student were selected but the author had only one prize. She suggested a vote to choose the winner but the three Taktse students offered to award the prize to the student from Delhi. The parents and teachers who were attending the workshop were impressed by such a magnanimous gesture coming from such young students. They couldn't stop themselves from coming and congratulating us. Almost all of us cried to see our students' generosity.



because of her writing skills. The Scholastic team invited her to submit her write up for publication. If her work is chosen, she could become the first young author from Sikkim.

We are very excited about this possibility, and hope you are equally pleased to hear about it. We are very grateful for this wonderful opportunity to expose our students to books and authors, and to showcase their talents at Bookaroo.



One of our students, Dechen Wangmo Tamang, is our former librarian Ms. Srijana's daughter. She was praised by many authors during the workshop

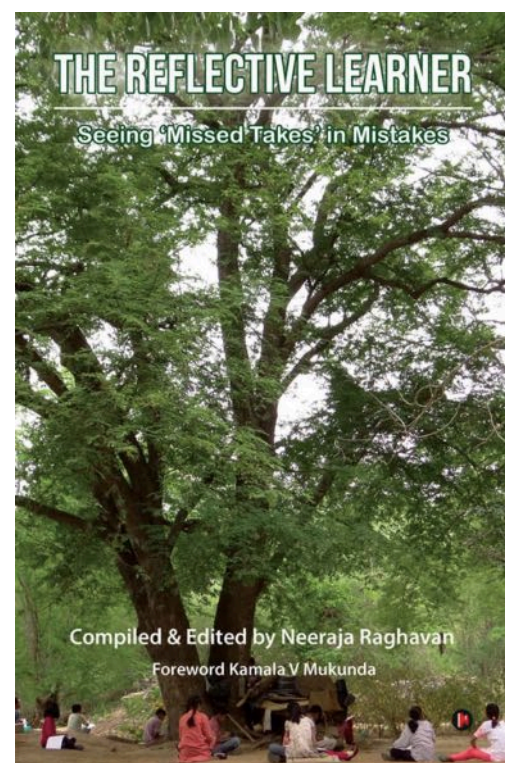


**Dr. Neeraja Raghavan** is the Founder-Director of [\*ThinkingTeacher\*](#). She has a doctorate in Chemistry from Princeton University, and has taught, served as Principal, developed custom curricula, and provided professional development to teachers at several schools including Taktse. Her research interests currently focus on teacher development through reflective practice.

## The Reflective Learner

Is there a way of exploring the work of students beyond just 'right' and 'wrong'? Mistakes are an important part of the learning process. A teacher stands to gain a better understanding of the workings of his or her students' minds by systematically examining the thought process behind their mistakes.

In her recently released book [\*The Reflective Learner – Seeing 'Missed Takes' in Mistakes\*](#), Dr. Neeraja Raghavan provides accounts of teachers such as Taktse's Prerna Pradhan and Michael Moses, who helped their students gain confidence in their writing and math abilities by overcoming their fear of making mistakes and viewing them instead as learning tools.







## Five Years and Still Going Strong

*by Ms. Kalika Mangrati, Grade 1 Homeroom Teacher*

Five years of teaching first grade has given me such joy!

Every morning at 8:45, my class of ten girls and five boys, gathers outside the classroom. Some rummage through their bags, some fight the great battle of untying their shoe laces, some collect themselves after their long bus ride and some engage in animated conversations.

When the bell rings, the students line up and file into the classroom. After turning in their homework, they sit in a circle on the red carpet and we greet each other with cheerful smiles. I had not realized how important this ritual was until the day I forgot. Riggyal came and asked me with an anxious voice “Miss, why didn’t you say good morning to us today?” From that day on, our morning greeting has taken place without fail.



After the morning meeting, my students launch into their schedule which includes math, literacy, Hindi/Dzongkha, and library/dharma. Between lessons the class echoes with joyful laughter and chatter in English, Hindi and Nepali. One of their favourite times of the day is Choice Time, a block where they can choose to do things they love. Kinsum is always seen tucked in the corner of the class library reading a picture book. Adhrit, Kenzo and Anya work together to build and solve Minecraft mazes with Legos. A group of girls sketches their favourite anime characters in the art corner.

After lunch, Quiet Time is all about reading and relaxing. Students choose a book from the library and lie down on the carpet, which helps them calm down after all the running around at lunch recess.

Our day ends with Closing Circle, where joyful moments are shared and grievances are aired.

“How was your day?” I ask. “Ecstatic” Adrit replies, proud to use a new vocabulary word. “Miserable” Nima says, frowning, “My friends left me back in the lunchroom.”

Sometimes they bring a packet of chips or sweets to share, which is relished by everyone. If there is not enough for everyone, I perform my magic trick, breaking the treats into smaller pieces so everyone can partake. It warms my heart to see how the students savour each piece with such great joy.

After five years, some teachers might become bored, but each year I feel more and more excited to connect with and shape these little lives.



Ms Kalika’s 1st graders performed “Stone Soup” for the school, developing teamwork and leadership, and overcoming their fear of facing a big audience at a very young age.



Emily Hart is a science educator and climate activist. She has been teaching biology and environmental science at Gann Academy in Massachusetts for the past five years. Last fall she spent a month working with Taktse science teachers..



## Taktse-Gann Science Institute

by Emily Hart

The Taktse-Gann Science Institute became a reality in February 2019 when Ms. Pujamani and Mr. Ganesh traveled to Boston. While there, they worked with the Gann Academy science department to develop an engaging

science curriculum and activities using the principles of understanding by design. Since then, we continued our collaboration over video calls, and Ms. Pujamani and Mr. Ganesh shared their learning with the Taktse teachers through professional development sessions. This fall I had the opportunity to travel from Gann Academy to Taktse to work in person with Ms. Pujamani, Mr. Ganesh, and other teachers in Taktse's science affinity group.

Collaborating one-on-one with Taktse science teachers has been amazing. I've been able to build relationships with science teachers across grade levels and disciplines as we create new activities and tackle teaching challenges together. It's exciting to see how teachers carry forward these skills and ideas as they prepare for their next school year. I've been able to see how deeply Taktse teachers care about helping their students learn science. I'm grateful to everyone at Taktse for the opportunity to witness the Taktse-Gann Science Institute grow!







## Grandparents' Day

At Taktse, we celebrate the lives of people who have been a part of our children's education, such as grandparents. They nurture their grandchildren, finding time to talk to them, guide them, and help them reflect on life. We recently organized Grandparents' Day to celebrate and appreciate their contributions. The children

expressed their appreciation by showcasing their talents through dance and speech.



## Studying Prejudice

Grade 6 students learn about prejudice in their social studies class. One of the goals is to raise awareness amongst their friends about the causes and effects of prejudice. The students and teachers have thoroughly enjoyed learning – and unlearning – as they work closely with their peers.



## Connection & Generosity

In 1986, an American couple adopted a Sikkimese toddler named Pema at Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity orphanage in Calcutta.

When Pema attended graduate school at the University of Denver, she made friends with Aka Denjongpa, son of Taktse founders Sonam and Maria Denjongpa.

Pema recently married Eddie Fox. In lieu of gifts, they generously requested that well-wishers donate to Taktse, raising over \$1,500 for the school.

## Educators Wanted

Are you an experienced educator?

Contribute to progressive education in a breathtaking Himalayan setting!

For more information, contact:

Rinchen Pakhrin

[rinchen.pakhrin@taktse.org](mailto:rinchen.pakhrin@taktse.org)

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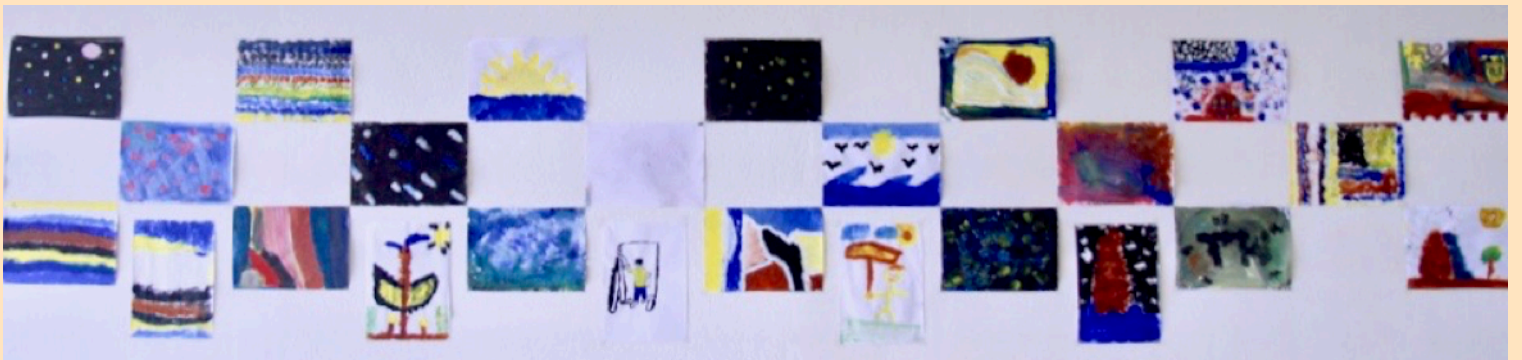




## Creative Arts

Taktse's arts curriculum enhances and nurtures the creative side of every student. Taktse's art teacher, Mr. Vishal, has been working closely with our students to help them develop their individual talents.

Grade 5 is working on abstract paintings.



## Computer Coding

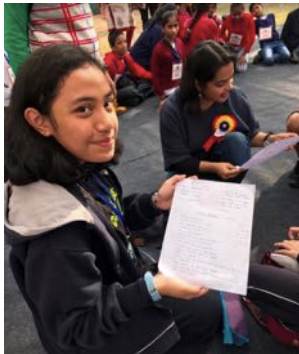
Grade 2 students learn how to code using Scratch, a program created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab. Scratch is a block-based visual programming language for kids, who learn by recreating their own version of the PACMAN game.













*The Taktse Board of Directors, faculty, staff and students are deeply grateful to the following donors for their generous support over the past year. We also acknowledge the generosity of the many in-kind donors, especially His Holiness Dordrupchen Rinpoche, and past donors, whose support has contributed so much to our success.*

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