



First Steps in Schooling

Our very first experiences of schooling at a tender age go a long way in determining our later responses to the process of learning, education and even interactions with others, new environments. At L'avenir, special care is taken to settle the children in gently, and invite them to open up gradually, as they take their first steps in the schooling adventure. Given below is an account of one such journey... .. As you read, do take note of the teacher's attitude towards the children and her approach in planning... .. though to the outer eye the activities might be similar to what takes place normally - painting, sandpit, rhymes, puzzles, etc. - the aspiration to sincerely understand each child's needs and sensitively provide for these while creating a group, is woven in - lifting the activities to a different level and accomplishing more than just teaching.

Age group: 2-3 yrs.; Group size: 16 children, 3 facilitators (didis); Month: April 2008

7th April – Still I remember the day. Inwardly I was a little puzzled and nervous to have totally fresh children and new co-teachers (didis). But at the same time I was very excited to receive them. We thought before starting the new session we should organize the class room.

All didis started working together and started getting involved according to their interest. For example, Mousmi and Sarika were busy in craft work and I was busy in setting up physical spaces. However, all of us were very happy in beautifying the class room. Keeping the needs and interests of two-year-olds in mind, we organized our class room so they could feel comfortable and at home when they came to L'avenir.

For example, we created different corners to have different activities, so the children could explore the corners according to their interest. Behind doing this our main motive was to hold their interest so they could mix up with friends as well as with didis. Gradually these processes would lead them to settle down at L'avenir.

On 7th morning we gathered in the class room for a collective meditation to offer our prayer to the Mother and ask her to protect us and take care of the children. Then I went to pick up the children who





Mousumi with new children (18-24 months)



were to come in the school van. Mousmi and Sarika were at the school to receive other children.

As the children were walking in and coming to the class room most of them looked very puzzled to come into a new place. But gradually they started making an effort and by the end of the day all seemed to be very happy playing with parents and didis.

The first week of April went by quite relaxed but at the same time it was hectic too. Most of the parents were there to help their children settle down in the new surroundings. Some of the children were not ready to leave their parents but some of them were very happy and bid goodbye to their parents. They were quite independent

and played happily without asking too much about their parents. However, even these children would at times become unsettled when they would see other children crying. By the end of April 80% children felt settled while the rest were still in the process.

After working with the children I found that each had different interests and I came up with 6 common interest areas – painting, free play in the toy room and outdoors, sandpit, cycling, water play and visiting the horses in the paddocks/stables. I was very flexible and ready to move according to the group interests for the children's sake. Along with this I was also making an effort to reach out to all of them and win their hearts and build their trust in me.

Gradually with time I felt the group started coming together and taking interest in each other. At the end of the month most of them started listening and responding to didis.

Our main aims for the month of April were:

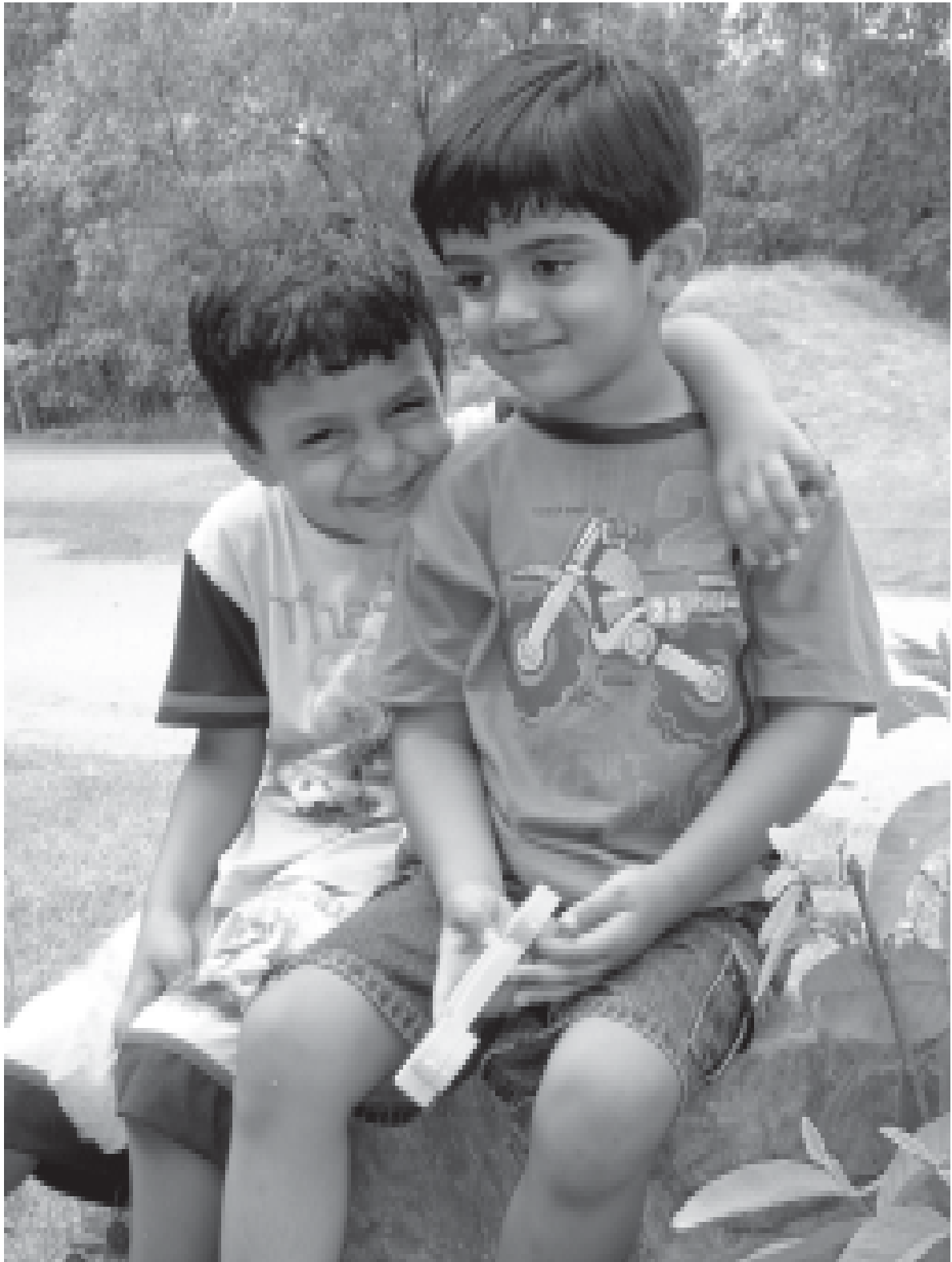
- To help children settle down at L'avenir
- Smooth transition from home to school
- Give space to each child to explore and understand each other

Reflecting upon the month, today I can see much progress has taken place...

- The children have started understanding and responding to the group rules
- They have started responding to the different activity corners and their functions
- Singing, dancing and sharing time has become very active and popular and children have also started participating in these activities happily
- Children have started sitting at one place to eat together
- Some of them have started developing sharing skills

Is it not remarkable that aged only a little above 2 years, the children have achieved so much in such little time!

✍️ Asha Jha; Photos by Yogita



age group: 3-4 yrs.