

Review by Eric Miller.

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My wife and I are delighted to have found Cascade Family Learning Services (in Chennai) for our teenager! Ms. Vidya Shankar is one-in-a-million. Many educators speak the student-centred words she speaks -- but she has been able to build an organisation that is actually putting this theory into practice. This is very rare, anyplace in the world!

Many educators say, "We do not teach students what to think. We teach them how to think". I am happy to report that in the case of Cascade, my family has found this to be the case.

In this review, I am referring to ways Cascade works with its teenage (adolescent) students, because this is what I, as a father of a teenage student at Cascade, have some knowledge of. I am using some of the language that Cascade uses -- but only because I have found that these words are truly being put into practice at Cascade.

Cascade nurtures teenager students' natural love of learning. It encourages self-directed learning that promotes self-confidence, independent thought and action, and intellectual development -- while also fostering social-emotional growth. As we all know, teenage students' growing personalities hinge on their moral development. Cascade's teenage students develop within the context of a respectful, caring, family-like community. The students thrive, actualize their potential, and develop a sense of self. The teenage students are beginning to position themselves in society, and are beginning to decide on their own personal missions. The self-directed learning that occurs for Cascade's teenage students promotes self-confidence and independent thought and action, while also fostering social-emotional and intellectual growth.

The students learn to question (respectfully), think critically (objectively and rationally), and to take responsibility for their own learning. Students are naturally curious and have a strong internal drive to discover how the world works.

Cascade's teenage students do all of this while preparing for exams required for school completion. Cascade provides teenage students with support and training for the NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) board examinations (10th Std, etc).

Cascade teachers ask thought-provoking questions -- and also encourage the students to formulate such questions. The NIOS readings are just a starting point. Teenagers today can research well-beyond textbooks. The students are asked: What interests you about the topic? What fascinates you? What do you want to learn more about? Is there a point you would like to make relating to the topic?

The teenage students are encouraged to keep journals about what they are learning and thinking about, regarding each of the 6 NIOS subjects they are studying. In this way, the students develop the excellent habit of exploring and expressing their thoughts through the written word -- both by hand and by typing on computers. Self-exploration and self-expression are keys to learning about the world -- both inside and outside oneself.

Teenage students at Cascade come to be driven by their own intellectual and creative passions. They take ownership of their education. The teachers give input that help the students keep in mind an overview of the field, so that all is kept in perspective. This input refines the students' reading, writing, reasoning, and research skills. The Cascade program is designed around assisting the students to discover and develop their own natural intellectual interests, abilities, and skills.

I have seen all of the above occurring with my own teenager.

In conclusion, all I can say is, "Thank you, Cascade! May you continue to grow and to influence the world around you!"