



Following are impressions from Michael Baldwin on his recent trip to Taktse International School with longtime friends, Phillip Long and Sally Hunsdorfer.

Impressions from Taktse

by Michael Baldwin, co-founder of [The Marion Institute](#), May 20, 2011

What is it about Taktse that gets one so fired up, as we ALL did? Is it the dedication of the Lauenstein-Denjongpa family; Maria, Sonam, Pintso, and, from afar, Aka; who have devoted themselves so selflessly to this educational cause? Is it the endless contributions of their co-trustees, Lok Babu and Aga Pema? Is it the creativity of the Sikkimese teachers as they invent a dynamic new educational model blending the best of East and West? Or is it the enthusiasm of the students themselves who come to school every day eager to stretch their limits?

Perhaps they are inspired by their love of Sikkim, their teacher, H.H. Dodrup Chen Rimpoche, and, even, the inspiration of the ultimate teacher, Guru Rimpoche, who brought Buddhism to Tibet and Sikkim and called Sikkim "The Hidden Land", with a degree of reverence that is awesome. Not sure, but their devotion and enthusiasm oozes impactfully all the time!

Motivated by the blatant shortcomings of an educational system well-entrenched, a few Sikkimese people with very limited means of their own, and no assurance that enough funds could be raised, embarked upon the creation of a new school. They believed that teachers would be found who could teach in more dynamic ways, that money could be raised, that infrastructure could be built, and that, most of all, parents could be persuaded to offer their children a chance at learning in a more meaningful way. This expression of hope for a better future is mind-boggling in its audacity, yet it is coming true at Taktse!



Of course, many challenges remain, such as finishing the new building, adding 11th and 12th grades, raising teachers salaries to a more competitive level, paving the access road, funding scholarships, and the list goes on. But for a school that is only in its sixth year, the progress is truly remarkable. Tuition income already meets basic operating costs, and once the infrastructure is complete the school will be more or less self-sustaining.

I suppose education throughout the world, with some exceptions of course, is generally deficient. We see it hugely in our own back yard in New Bedford,

Massachusetts. In India, the public school system is typically based on rote memorization, strictly disciplined to a fault, and so wholly uninspiring you want to cry.



Philip Long and Michael Baldwin

Passionless teachers provide a lifeless form of education that stifles critical thinking, offers few opportunities for artistic growth, and does not foster the intellectual abilities that will be sorely needed by tomorrow's leaders facing intractable problems.

By contrast, sitting in on Taktse classes, and watching the students and teachers in action, you cannot help but feel uplifted by the magnificence of Taktse teaching practices! These kids are not just learning, they are LOVING IT! Students often PREFER to be at Taktse rather than at home, which can sometimes be awkward with parents who wonder if their kids are having too much fun at school to be learning anything!

This little school tucked away in the tiny former kingdom of Sikkim in the remote Eastern Himalayas is making a big difference to about 140 students. It is also creating a model that can be studied and replicated elsewhere so that many more students can receive a truly meaningful and rewarding education. Aside from teaching basic subjects in inspiring ways, Taktse also inculcates an awareness about nature, about "spirit," about community, about sharing and caring, and about basic living skills which are usually ignored at other schools. All of it represents an extremely well-rounded educational system that will, I am confident, turn out movers and shakers for our fragile world.



Sally Hunsdorfer with Taktse students

I hope that I have provided an inkling of the joy and inspiration that we three felt at Taktse. Thank you Taktse and the glorious folks associated with it!

