

# Music Education for All

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When music is taken up as a medium of expression, learning, and exploration with groups of students, along with the right planning and contextual discussions, it creates an immense potential for the awareness and practice of inclusion. In this article, I present a few instances in which I discovered the potential among my students to create a mindset for inclusion in different contexts. I could leverage this to benefit my pedagogy.

## Correcting the gender bias

In folk music performances (at least here in Rajasthan), women are more often seen singing or dancing than playing a musical instrument. More specifically, when it comes to playing percussion instruments (like drums), there is a prevailing bias towards choosing boys that perhaps goes unnoticed.

However, in simple class observations and performances where competencies connecting with rhythm and sur (pitch, notes) recognition are continuously assessed and compiled, the gender representation data states that there are girls who have a great sense of rhythm and are exceptionally good at playing percussion.

I noticed that many girls showed interest in playing drums, so we ensured the participation of girls based on their ability to play well just as we did with the boys. This was discussed in the classroom as well, assuring students

that if they practise well, they will get the opportunity to perform regardless of their gender. A mixed-gender group presented a musical performance on Independence Day for the community members. This also marked a focused intent of scaling the discussion on gender in other areas of the school functioning and gradually changing mindsets.

## Song wall

Our classroom practices ensure that students get exposure to singing and learn songs from different languages. In my classroom, it is done in part using a 'song wall'. Songs in English, Hindi, Marwari, Malayalam, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil, are written and displayed along with transliteration for supported reading and understanding. The song lyrics are written on charts in bold text, that are colour-coded according to song sections, such as verse, chorus, etc. for easy understanding. Because it is visual, it aids students' learning and since it allows easy access, the song wall helps them learn at their own pace.



Figure 1. A girl playing the drums along with the boys.

## Group performances

For most students, singing and playing instruments are pleasurable activities but if some of them do not enjoy these, they are included in supporting roles, such as preparing and managing props.

For one musical drama, we chose 'India is rich through the wisdom it collectively represents from all its languages' as the central idea. We selected *dohe* or couplets from a few languages – Tamil, Marathi, Marwari and Sanskrit – and wrote them in their original language along with their transliteration in Devanagari script so that all students could read those. We composed simple tunes for them and presented the meaning of the *dohas* through a short drama.

## Connecting with roots

One of the many aspects of the cultural heritage of Rajasthan is its rich musical identity. Barmer district, because of its vastness, fuels this musical identity with its array of folk musicians from various religious and communal backgrounds.

While discussing folk music, its roots, themes and significance, many students mention songs they have heard in their village, their family/community gatherings, etc., and they are given opportunities to perform them as part of their musical practice and exploration.

We recently screened a documentary 'Indus Blues', which highlights many communities of the Indus region that

overlap Rajasthan and Pakistan. After the screening, one of the students talked about his grandfather who plays the folk instrument *Alghoza* and shared his experiences of listening to it in his home and communal gatherings. Another student talked about another instrument *Murlī Been* that can be heard on the streets of their village during festivals.

This manner of connecting with common roots facilitates the following:

- Allows the students to understand and appreciate their own and each other's cultural practices in a positive light.
- Creates possibilities for the teacher to plan and invite musicians from the local communities and enable constructive discussions among students and artists.
- Creates a sense of belonging and establishes strong bonds.

In a region where discrimination based on caste and religion is frequently observed amongst the older generations, the awareness that students develop through these interactions is a step towards inclusion.

## No one left behind

Students with learning difficulties and physical disabilities can easily take part in learning together in a music classroom. As with other subjects, their needs may be divergent, and a teacher with sensitivity and awareness of these will be able to adapt their activities in ways that they too can actively participate.

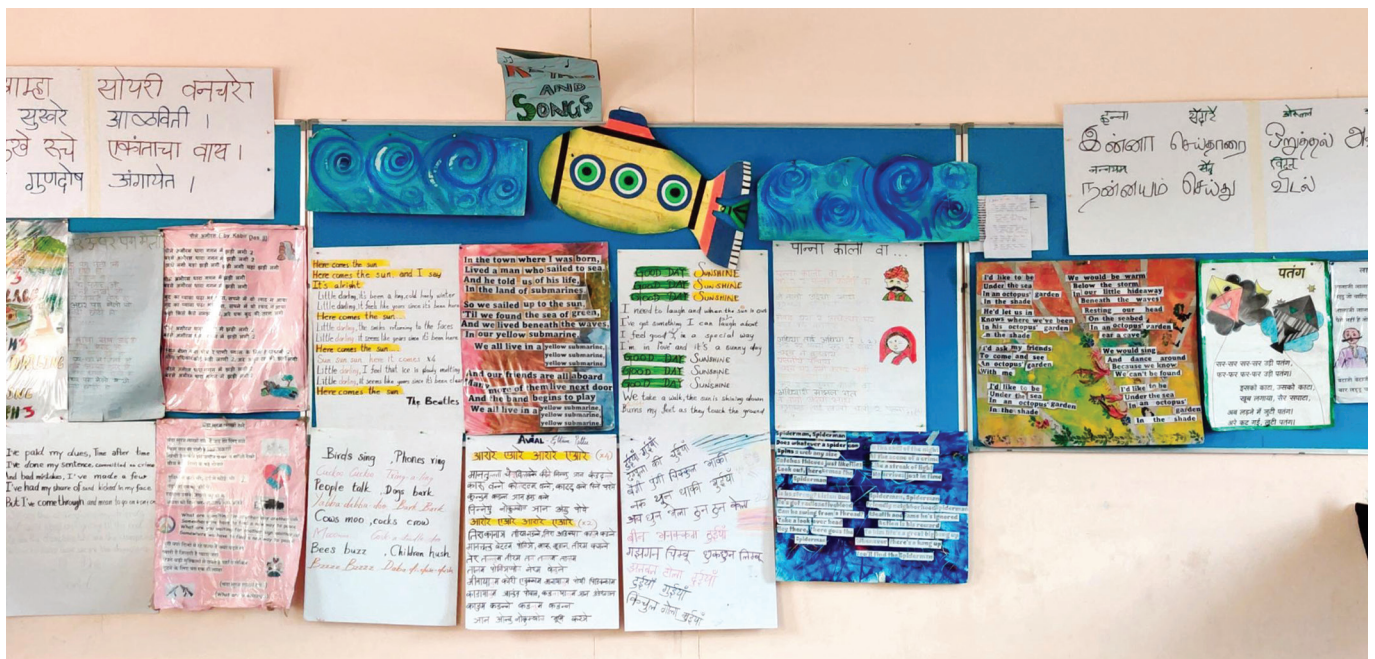


Figure 2. Our Song Wall.

Example 1: I conduct an activity in which students are asked to close their eyes, actively listen to live/recorded music and visualise/imagine anything they like, which connects them with the music. Afterwards, they are given time to share their thoughts and imaginations. In one group, there is a student with a cochlear implant who also has speech difficulty. He is energetic and takes a lot of interest, so the other students cheer him on to share his ideas and appreciate his enthusiasm. They listen carefully and try to understand his words. If a teacher can facilitate and guide such activities, students start to bring in a scale of inclusivity that far exceeds expectations.

Example 2: Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may often have challenges in a standard classroom setting. Even on preliminary observations, we were able to notice that one of the foundational stage students with autism was able to calm down and sit for a longer duration when in the music classroom. These observations are crucial, as they provide vital information in developing a classroom and pedagogy towards the inclusion of all children in daily activities and learning.

Bringing inclusive practices into music teaching is possible and should be given considerable importance in classrooms. There are components of inclusion that are easy to do through music education and others

that are more complex. But with the right support and understanding amongst the school faculty, and appropriate preparation, it is achievable.



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