

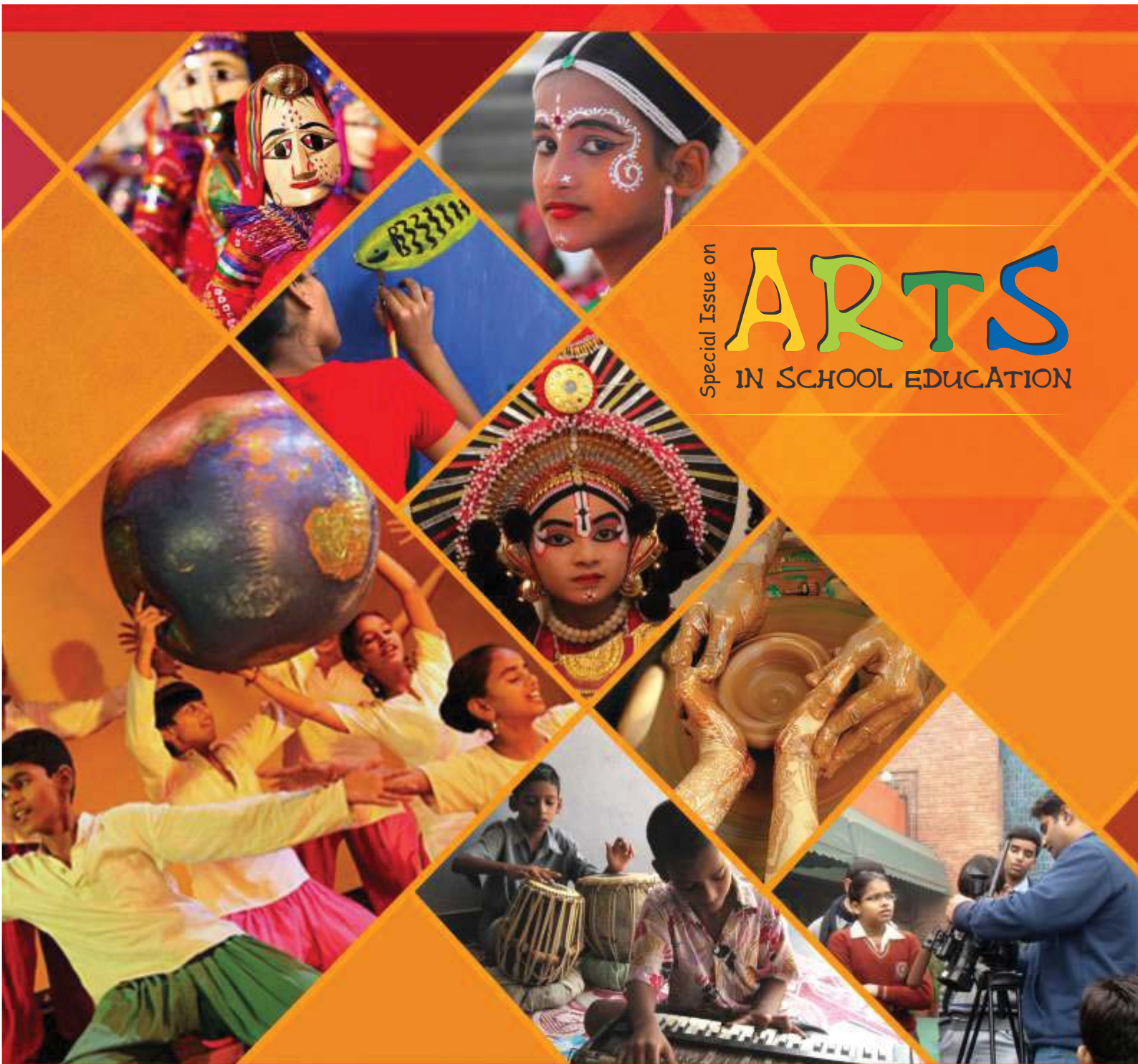


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Special Issue on

ARTS

IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

Inside : Broad Picture, Some Perspectives and Personal Reflections

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“Learning Curve is a publication on education from Azim Premji University. It aims to reach out to teachers, teacher educators, school heads, education functionaries, parents and NGOs, on contextual and thematic issues that have an enduring relevance and value to help practitioners. It provides a platform for the expression of varied opinions, perspectives, encourages new and informed positions, thought-provoking points of view and stories of innovation. The approach is a balance between being an ‘academic’ and ‘practitioner’ oriented magazine.”

From the editor

First, as the new Editor of the Learning Curve, I want to say a big Hello to everyone reading this issue of our magazine. I've been a school teacher for over 30 years and while I think I am familiar with the workings of a school, both as a system dispensing literacy and education as well as a social edifice, this particular experience- that of editing a magazine that reaches the hands of an extremely conscious sophisticated readership is a new one. And one that I welcome with excitement and anticipation.

As everyone is aware, the Azim Premji Foundation has been concentrating on specific subjects in each issue, so that the needs of particular subject teachers are met while informing other subject teachers of the nuances of that particular theme. There have been issues which have concentrated on Maths, on Language and on Sports. The purpose of these specialist issues has been to provide a platform for expert views as well as specific experiences in that particular arena.

This time we are presenting an issue on the Arts. Art is everywhere around us – in Indian life, artistry is all encompassing, from the early morning practice of drawing patterns outside our homes, whether they are called *alpana*, *rangoli* or *kolam*. In passing it should be mentioned that these intricate drawings depend not only on a steady hand or artistic eye, they are also highly mathematical. Then, homes across the country, especially in rural and semi-urban India are seamlessly designer. The simple *lota*, with its perfect shape, which comes in all sizes and is used ubiquitously in our homes, is a marvel of designing genius.

Our walls decorated with all kinds of human, animal and bird figures, not to mention drawings of the plants and trees. A short walk down any village will reveal temples and homes which are unique in their beauty.

Of course, we take it all for granted. The richness of Indian fabrics, the weaves, the pattern, the colours come into our consciousness as things of beauty and joy only when mentioned by a non-Indian. Then there are the varied art forms across the country in dance, music, sculpture, puppetry, woodwork, and ceramics.

With such a breathtaking array of art around us, it is easy to ignore it all and succumb to the nitty-gritty of everyday living which has become so demanding that we have to be reminded of our



legacy and, more than the legacy itself, of the good it does to us when we learn and practice any art, whatever it may be. In earlier times, some one or other form of art was automatically learnt, if not formally then by default because homes were repositories of art. Singing, whether solo or in a group, dancing were all part of everyday learning. Schools encouraged the art class.

Then, sometime in the late sixties and seventies, came the great divide. Technical advancement became the mantra of success, which itself took on a new definition, and the arts were as a result sidelined.

The humanities were renamed 'arts subjects' and were looked down upon. From here it was easy to enter into a life that ignored the arts, thereby doing great emotional harm to subsequent batches of students who were left with no time to pursue spirit-enhancing subjects like drawing, painting, weaving, singing, dancing. These were relegated to the category of hobbies, to be pursued or not as time permitted. And in most cases, time did not permit.

Increasingly, though, the ill-effects of this myopic policy have begun to be apparent. The burthen of the collective message of this issue is: in the life of our children, Art is as essential as any other subject. Art sharpens perceptions of the world around us, it increases awareness and sensitivity. It also enhances human relationships as we discover the similarities of the artistic experience. There is a general recognition of the fact that the word 'art' encapsulates within itself a wealth of meaning, as witness phrases such as the art of writing, of communication, of social and political exchange.

As for art and the child, there is ample scientific evidence to prove that art intensifies a child's understanding of the world around her, helps to organize experiences which, in later life, create personality. Children with special needs respond to art in the most mature and unexpected ways. Outside of school, children who attend arts classes, whatever the form, are much better adjusted with the extra dimension that art provides in their lives.

So here it is. Your feedback is eagerly awaited. Please tell us what you liked – and did not – so that we can improve our future issues.

Go ahead and enjoy – while I get my paintbrush out!

Prema Raghunath
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pencil

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Ar.

The background is a green-tinted collage of various drawings. On the left, there is a large, stylized face with a wide smile and large eyes. To the right of the face is a simple drawing of a house with a chimney. Below the house is a landscape drawing featuring a sun, a palm tree, and a horse. To the right of the house is another landscape drawing with a moon, a bird, and some plants. The entire collage is set against a solid green background.

Section A

Broad Picture

01 Art, Politics, Perception

Kaustuv Roy

Art instructors are used to the question, sometimes benign, sometimes inquisitive, sometimes disparaging, sometimes hostile, from myriad sources including parents, teachers, administrators, and certainly students, “What is the point of learning art?” This question of course rides on the shoulder of many other unstated underlying questions such as “Is not art a luxury or a middle class pursuit?” “Can we not leave art to those genuinely interested or talented in art?” “How is art practically useful?” “Is not art redundant in the age of digitalized production and reproduction?” And so on. Certainly, to my mind, these questions are askable, and I have not typically snapped back with the retort: “If ‘mathematizing’ of children’s thinking can be accepted without batting an eyelid, why not aestheticizing of the same?” In fact I have mostly received such pointed queries in a polite spirit. However, since every question has underlying presumptions, to be able to even superficially respond to the above question one must begin with, in this case, the image of art in the collective social mind from where it springs. So let us begin there.

When we think of art, not uncommonly, what comes to mind are canvases, watercolors, sculptures, and other artifacts. That is to say, the images evoked are mostly the end products of artistic endeavour. Contrast this with, say, the case of mathematics wherein we hear of mathematical reasoning or mathematical thinking and even mathematization. In other words, while value is placed on logical or systematic thinking, art, generally speaking, is measured mostly in terms of its visible end products, and not in terms of the aesthetics of thought and perception. It is no

wonder then that questions such as the ones above are asked. For if art is only measured by its artifacts and has no other ramification in schooling or in the social collective then of course it is best left to practicing artists who may be able to produce valuable objects. But let us inquire if art is something more and therefore we have to ask if there is some other significance to the learning and teaching of art that is not easily visible, that does not coincide with artifact, and if so what is its conceptual basis, how should we determine its qualities, and what are its practices?

The Politics of Art

Like mathematics, art is a distinct mode of apprehension of space apart from other things, and hence has the potential to be deployed for describing the world; and since any process of description of the world makes choices and selections, even minimally the language of art becomes political. Further, when art is introspective, as it often is, it probes and intervenes in the psychic theatre making art’s function micropolitical, that is, able to act at the level of individual relations. We know for example that the classical paintings sometimes played into the hands of vassal society and held up existing property relations just as at the opposite end cubism did away with single perspective view of the subject ending an epoch and beginning a new way of apprehending the world and subject relations within it. Both the above are political positions whether intended or not, whether conscious or not. Therefore I would like to argue that art, in describing and redescribing the world reconstitutes space whether through representation or abstraction, through difference or repetition.



So if art plays a significant role in the normalization of Power can it not also play a role in the de-normalization and demystification of Power in its various forms and at different levels? That is the question I want to address here in a very limited way. For if the answer is yes, then there is an artistic thinking that is just as relevant as is mathematical thinking apart from artifacts. And if education and learning is a groping toward freedom and self-knowledge then art will have as much to contribute as, say, mathematics or science to human destiny.

Cubism and Surrealism: Planes of Transformation

In order to demonstrate the above we will briefly look at two styles of art that emerged in the twentieth century and see what they can tell us about artistic thinking and reasoning and its impact on the socio-political domain. The first of these movements in art I will refer to is Cubism. Alfred Barr, the first curator of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, wrote



Jean Metzinger, Woman with a Horse, 1911

“Cubism was the invention of Picasso and Braque but it was inspired by Cezanne who pointed out that natural forms if simplified to **geometrical essentials** become cubes and cylinders. This was the first stage of Cubism. Having reduced the form to cubes and cylinders and spheres, it is not a difficult step to juggle them somewhat to combine in one picture the front and back of the same figure, to substitute the concave for the convex and to do all of these things according to the aesthetic sensibility of the artist.” (emphasis mine)

So what does the Cubist attempt? S/he analyzes lines and planes, abstracts and formalizes and essentially celebrates simultaneity and multiple perspectives. By altering uniperspectival perception Cubism disturbs the very background of spatial understandings making it possible for new thoughts to arise at an ontogenic level. This is always dangerous to the foundations of paternalism and politically entrenched positions. There are also advantages to understanding the human also as a formal projective geometry. That is to say when the image of thought is changed from the apparently unified object to its constituent geometries, plasticity is introduced by which extensions and new amalgams are possible. In other words, such projection makes it possible for new lines and planes and tangents to meet, intersect, modify and extend the existent subject (person). The narrow, delineated form of the self and its boundaries are left behind for a more fluid, porous and creative self that is more directly engaged with the world. All serious movements require grassroot reconceptualization of the geo-politics of the body.

Let us next consider a movement in art that came as a reaction to Cubism namely Surrealism or Superrealism. In Barr’s words again, “puritanical exclusion of all sentimental and ‘human’ values by the cubists of 1908...has induced in the last generation a reaction which has produced paintings of extraordinary originality...Surrealism.” Two inter-war intellectual figures and their works were central to Surrealism. The



first was Sigmund Freud and his famous book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and the second was the poet André Breton and his *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

The surrealists understood the Freudian unconscious to be the real theatre of creative production and attempted to unite the world of fantasy and dreams to the everyday world of reality. Some of them attempted to do this through the Freudian technique of free association which was supposed to reveal the unconscious layer and its workings. The art coming out of it was thus often dreamlike. Surrealists believed in social and political revolution: if the mysterious unconscious that seemed to be at the root of human drives could be tapped human destiny itself could be changed; from being a mere subject of unconscious drives, the human subject could recreate her/himself by delving into the theatre of the unconscious through articulated means.

So although Cubism and Surrealism come from opposing camps, interestingly enough their political implications are similar; both indicate underlying structures that are pre-individual, one from a formal, geometric standpoint and the other from an affective, human viewpoint. Both offer the human subject the possibility of transformation.

Implications for Practice

So far we have attempted to show that art can be inherently political without politics being its subject. To put it differently, there is such a thing as artistic thinking that has important consequences for the individual as well as for society and therefore for education. But one question remains to be answered. What is the implication of all this for school practice? Surely we do not expect children, however artisti-



Pablo Picasso *Three Musicians*, 1921

cally inclined, to understand personal and political transformation, and if the foregoing is comprehensible only by the intellectual or the connoisseur of art what would be the point of this discussion? We have to answer this question in a convincing fashion if at all this is to be taken seriously by the educator. Let us begin in that direction by looking at certain practices and perceptions that can be associated with the above. I

will outline some practices and explain what implications these may have for developing artistic thinking and their consequences for our ordinary lives. In order to deal with the semiotics of art as a tool of thought at the grassroots level we have to develop some pedagogical angles that are transformative for the teaching-learning complex.

First, in art classrooms it is commonplace to find students given the task of copying pictures. This is imitation and is of little value other than reinforcing dead relationships without developing the capacity to judge and understand spatiality which is a primary purpose of doing art. Imitation breeds conformity and is not emancipatory. Therefore, the first principle



Albert Tucker *The Metamorphosis of Ned Kelly* 1970



in teaching art is that we must avoid imitation; children must not be made to copy pictures or work done by someone else. It defeats the very purpose of art and we lose our way right at the beginning. To mimic is to conform but the idea here is to encourage direct perception from the outset. To observe, to learn how to look quietly and purposefully is to be sensitive to the eco-environment and is the first step of a political being.

Second, in teaching art we must not look for representative correspondence or accuracy of reproduction in children’s work but look for angles, peculiarities, and nuances that describe the subjective truth. The artist emphasizes certain things and ignores others; children do the same spontaneously and this must be carefully acknowledged. The teacher must deliberately move away from evaluating the child’s work in terms of the usual adjectives such as “beautiful” or “bad” etc. and instead begin a dialogue between the work and the child in terms of what s/he saw and attempted to convey. This dialogue enhances the linguistic capacities and communicative competence of the student. The development of this capacity is the second step of a political being.

Third, and this may seem counter-intuitive and contrary to popular practice, but children must not be asked to draw from the imagination. Instead they must first learn to draw only what they see. Art is not fantasy; it is a systematic language that presupposes a grammar. Anything is worth drawing as long as one observes it carefully, understands its pattern. Distortions may be introduced later for achieving certain artistic aims. Drawing what one sees is not mere reproduction but a kind of reflective practice of looking. To be true to what one sees, or to the ‘what

is’ without compromise is the third step of a developing political being.

Fourth, children must be encouraged to draw and illustrate actual situations from their particular lives. In other words, their work should have a large autobiographical element if they feel comfortable doing it (With respect to children with known problems and troubled lives, specialists should be consulted before asking them to do anything of this kind). To understand and read the world autobiographically is the fourth step of a nascent political being.

Finally, there should be an attempt to make children aware of their dreams and if possible recall some of it in their work if they feel safe doing it. This is an extension of the autobiographical element. It is indirectly suggesting to the children to take dreams seriously and engage that aspect of their lives in a systematic fashion from early on. Engagement with the psyche is a holistic element that is critical for becoming a full-fledged political being, able to engage with the world consciously and meaningfully, and since the drives and impulses that guide our destinies are often seminally rooted in the psyche their articulation is an important part of self-awareness.



Max Ernst Men Shall Know Nothing of This 1923

While this is hardly an exhaustive list of what could be done to promote systematic artistic thinking in the young, one can begin here. The alert reader will see that there is a coherent thread running through each of the above points. It is building a platform for an artistic way of looking at the self in relation to the world. This way of looking takes the self as a starting point and not as ending point and makes the boundary between self and the world more porous and migratory. Further, it is slowly and surely developing a



language for doing so; this is description. It will eventually allow the individual to sharpen their points of contact with the world in much the same way as a battery's terminals or points of contact are cleansed of encrustation for better conductivity. Artistic thinking allows us to have a better sense of who or what we are and that is certainly one important aim of progressive education. Just as the discovery of math-

ematical objects and proofs are important but equally important is mathematical thinking, in much the same way, while artifacts are important, they are but one of the culminations of certain processes that have other vital ends as well that may be shared by those who do not necessarily become artists.



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02 The Arts as Core Curriculum



Tara Kini

We have typically slotted all the arts taught in schools as “extra-curricular”. The connotation is that it is an addition to a curriculum, something that lies on the fringes - just outside the purview of all that is sacred! And what we really mean, without mincing words, is that it is non-academic. It does not end with that all-absolving Board Examination! So it is all right to accord it the space in the timetable when the children are tired – late afternoon – some dance, music and fine art before they pack their bags and dash for their waiting buses! The ‘important’ subjects like Mathematics and Language (Science is a close contender) occupy the pride of place in a timetable – the early hours of the day, when the children are fresh and eager to learn! Show me one school time table in which the day starts with singing, dancing, acting or painting and I will bow to that school philosophy, and say, “Ah! Now you are getting the essence of education!”

This is not my personal opinion or fancy. I would like to quote from a seminal book by Devi Prasad published by the National Book Trust, titled “Arts: The Basis of Education”. He represents the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore, our leading philosophers, whose ideas on education are of central importance in contemporary India.

Devi Prasad presents two main goals of education,

“Along with an understanding of the values one’s society cherishes and learning to practice them in life, education ought to inculcate a deep sense of discretion and a feeling of self-respect and freedom in the individual to be able to think independently and

make choices for himself or herself.”

He summarises his argument for why arts needs to form the basis of education with:

“In other words, education in general and art education in particular is a way for one to grow and become sensitive to the beauty in nature, of social values and the aesthetic aspects of life as a whole.”

However, with the impact of globalization and in our attempt to make our children ‘market worthy’ in the world economy, we have begun to lose our focus on art education. It is the creative arts that will enable a child to establish her roots and find the deeper meaning of life. This would stand her in good stead to face the sweeping changes that engulf the young adult in every part of the world. Further, creativity is an essential skill in the 21st century, and this is best honed in the realm of the creative arts and then transferred to all other learning as well.

If this is enough reason to move the status of the creative arts in school curricula from ‘extra-curricular’ to ‘core-curricular’, how would we go about building such a curriculum? More importantly, how would we implement such a curriculum in a manner that would address the needs of a child in her own particular context?

I would like to address these questions in the light of my experience as a practising teacher and educationist with some expertise in the professional development of teachers and curriculum development.

Building a curriculum with the arts at its focus

The first process note that I would stress in connection with building a curriculum is that it has to be a collaborative exercise with the teachers. It is only when a teacher recognises that she is a builder of curriculum and not a mere deliverer of a prescribed script, that she will own the curriculum and bring to it her own creative thoughts and input. I realize the time-intensive nature of this process that many schools may not want to apportion, but inherent in the process of collaborative curriculum development (with facilitation by a trained curriculum expert) is professional development opportunity for teachers, that will invariably ensure the quality of a school system.

When teachers articulate their values with respect to their domains of specialisation, and work together to decide what is most important to teach, the chances of there being deep learning for the students is raised a hundredfold.

The next step is to decide what themes to choose, to integrate learning around an arts focus. This requires brainstorming with expert facilitation. The themes that are chosen across the year must necessarily have the following features:

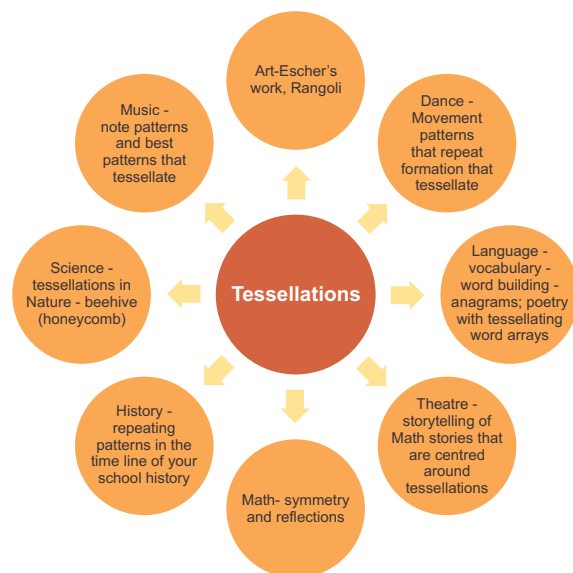
- The topic/ issue should be relevant to the child
- The theme should be of interest to the teacher team
- The theme should be relevant to the social context and values of the institution

To satisfy all these three criteria is a challenge, but brainstorming with the teacher team should be sufficient. Ideally, some discussion with the children is essential. However, given the fact that the curriculum needs to be in place before the start of the academic year, teachers could either brainstorm with their children at the end of the previous academic year, or document the ideas that emerge through the year

with their students, to arrive at issues or topics that would be relevant to their students. Informal discussions with students with this objective in mind would provide a rich incentive to get to know students better and their needs and priorities. That aspect of this process cannot be emphasized enough. Arriving at something that is meaningful to the child and getting to know our students well, is crucial for meaningful learning in the class room.

Web resources abound and ideas for cross curricular themes are available in plenty. Some resources are listed at the end of this article.

Once a topic has been decided upon, it is time for a brainstorm that could be captured in a mind map about how each discipline could approach the topic. Here is an example that I am creating, but with close resonance to actual work that we could achieve in a school - and that I have actively engaged in myself. The suggested content for the different domains in this mind map could be adapted to age appropriate levels for children of different grades. The best way to achieve this is to refer to a set of international standards (eg. McRel www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks) or National standards (eg. NCERT guidelines) and link the learning outcomes for every lesson to a standard that is age appropriate.





You may look at this mind map and wonder where the art focus is. In this layout of integrated learning, the topic of tessellations is one that lends itself to interdisciplinary skills in the creative arts like fine art, music, dance and theatre and in other disciplines too. Another approach would be to use themes like a historical event (World War II, for example) that could be rendered in music, dance, theatre and artwork.

When an integrated approach is used, learning becomes situated in the real world far more effectively than when each discipline is taught in an isolated compartment. When the arts are brought into the main focus of the integration, the sensitivity that Devi Prasad speaks of, the aesthetic aspects of life are highlighted.

Tagore (1922), in his book on Creative Unity, expresses each individual's need for creativity:

The joy of unity within ourselves, seeking expression, becomes creative; whereas our desire for the fulfilment of our needs is constructive. The water vessel, taken as a vessel only, raises the question, "Why does it exist at all?" Through its fitness of construction, it offers the apology for its existence. But where it is a work of beauty it has no question to answer; it has nothing to do, but to be. It reveals in its form a unity to which all that seems various in it is so related that, in a mysterious manner, it strikes sympathetic chords to the music of unity in our own being.

Centering the learning of children on the arts will enable not just deep learning but also create a sense of harmony within each learner. This is a vital need in the 21st century when mind-boggling advances in technology, coupled with an increasingly violent world, threatens to create discord within the human psyche. Not just skills of creativity, but creative unity in individuals and society as a whole can be envisioned with the arts as core curriculum in schools.



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03 Learning in Joy



Rati Basu

Celebrating the joy of being alive, a calf executes a series of sudden exuberant leaps, its limbs trembling with life force. A sudden sunburst after a sharp shower lights up a washed and scented earth. The blue flash of a kingfisher's wing; the sharp tut tut of a startled squirrel darting away with fluffed tail upraised; sal flowers floating down like a soft blessing; the sweet scent of far away jasmine carried on the cool night breeze; morning dew, grey on the green grass; the laughter of children out in the rain. Nature and Man participating in the cycle of life – feeling and being in joy.

Bright, happy faces and animated chatter fill the Patha Bhavana campus as children move from one tree-shaded class to another, the rays of the sun weaving changing patterns. Surrounded by the open beauty of the sky, the different seasons revolving before the eyes in all the magnificence of their colour, Nature is the greatest of all teachers.

The children come restless and eager with their senses fully alert. They do not ask: 'What shall I draw?' They just start making lines and images on the paper. At an early age, the child is guided mainly by impressions, he recognizes and is curious. This arouses in him a sense of wonder. In his pictures, objects are simply put together and their relative sizes are determined by the strength of impressions these objects have on his mind. A flower may be larger than a tree or a house. The ears, nose and hair are not immediately important, and so are often omitted. The known reality can become more important than the seen reality. Thus, while the four wheels of a cart/ car may be drawn, in actuality, only two or three are seen. To correct a child at this point is to destroy the

truth of his impression. Both viewpoints are equally valid and must be respected.

At times, a child may make the same image over and over again. This could be due to too much praise, or a sense of comfort in repeating a familiar image. (Many established artists also do this !) When this happens, a teacher can gently guide the child by suggestions, but not by impositions.

From placing random objects together, the child can be led slowly towards the idea of relationships between objects, their placement and relative sizes. In a child's drawing there may be a house, a fish, a tree, a bird, a figure. The child is encouraged to think about where each can be found i.e. fish in water, bird in sky or tree. "How will this figure enter the door of the house?" This question quickly resolves the problem of the size of the door and the house in relation to the figure, making the learning of proportion very simple, natural and logical.

Each child is unique, his observation and responses will not be the same as another child's. His ability to handle the pencil or colours will differ. Comparisons and judgments harm the natural rhythm of a child's work. He may start to feel inferior and unsure of himself and may start to copy others. Fear of not being good enough may destroy the child's spontaneous expression and take away the joy from art activities. A capable teacher of art is one who can enter the child's mind with sympathy and understanding. One who can see with the child's eyes, and help the child to see.

As a child grows older, he feels a need to capture his impressions more accurately and precisely, he wants



to depict objects as he observes them to be. Now he needs some technical knowledge, which should be given to him in a planned manner, keeping in mind his individual needs and aptitudes so that his innate creative impulse is not lost. This caring for the individual needs is essential if an art teacher wants to keep the sense of joy alive in a child.

There is joy in variety and children must be encouraged to use all the different materials available; chalk, pencil, charcoal, ink, watercolours and collage. Each medium has its own qualities and differences. A pencil line is thin, precise and sharp; oil pastel is thick and flowing; watercolour is more fluid, expressing mass and form rather than outline. Filling in of pencil drawing by colouring is a limiting exercise. Mixing of mediums helps in developing a better understanding of each medium – its possibilities and limitations. Use of collage develops a deeper sense of form. New ways of expression can make the work more interesting and attractive.

Changing the size, shape and orientation [horizontal/vertical] of paper can change the whole way of seeing. The use of scale/ ruler is discouraged, as the aim is not precise architectural drawing but an expression of the gist of the object drawn. The non-reliance on mechanical instruments increases the steadiness of the hand and develops a sharper observation prac-

tice. Later, when the child moves into senior classes, any mechanical instrument may be used without losing the freedom and spontaneous practice of earlier years.

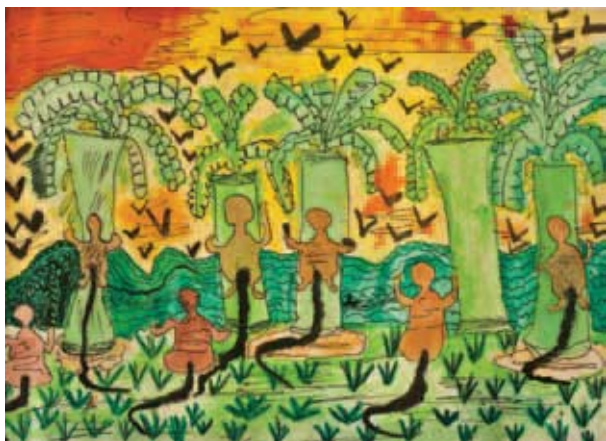
When the children are actively involved in selecting the medium in which they want to work, they have a sense of freedom from stress and invariably find something they are good at, and thus are happy about the outcome. The same is also true about the subject matter.

I feel working together is a very important part of class activities. Ideas are shared and planned, leading to mutual agreements or disagreements: the whole group being responsible for the work. The group could be horizontal or vertical. All start learning from each other; sharing, respecting the other's viewpoints, building up confidence collectively. These works could be small, two pages of an art copy or large, ten full imperial sheets put together to form one work. The child progresses from the former to the latter, building up confidence and learning to work in mutual cooperation, resolving differences. This activity generates a lot of joy and enthusiasm, energy, vitality and excitement in class.

Joy and excitement are essential in class activities. Joy can only be if the child is unafraid and confi-



Collective work, Class IV-X, watercolour and gel pen on paper 120" x 44", Patha Bhavanam Shanthiniketan



Poulami Ghosh, Class V, Water Colour, 10" x 8",
Patha Bhavana, Shantiniketan

dent. A child can be afraid due to too much criticism and directed action; fear of not doing the right thing; of failure. It is important to have a positive attitude and appreciate the work of each and every student. This is easy when each student's work is displayed and something positive is said about it. The child is encouraged to complete the work using the medium he has brought to class and also to talk about his work. These methods/ devices help in removing the 'threat' feeling and the child starts to relax and enjoy his work. He starts to realize that Art is not so difficult and that by trying, most things are possible.

It is my firm belief that art activities in schools should involve no gains or stress in terms of marks.

There should be no competition. The whole concept of judging one work 'best' out of many can only be a subjective exercise. It does no good - only harm.

When there is no stress of marks or competition, a profound sense of freedom is experienced. A feeling of dignity regarding each individual's ability and understanding of differences of ability helps to develop a realization that each one has something to contribute. This fosters confidence, and an attitude of sharing, learning, cooperation, exchange and therefore free self-expression and joy.

Learning being part of life's natural growth was always the objective in Santiniketan. So, education must be for life and not merely for knowledge and livelihood. The way the surroundings are kept, the way of dressing, of conducting oneself all help to develop a sense of beauty and aesthetics leading to a life of harmony with all existence.



Amrita Chattopadhyay, Class X, Oil Pastel, 22" x 15",
Patha Bhavana, Shantiniketan

I have taken help from the following articles,

1. Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School'
2. Rabindranath Tagore, 'A Poet's School'
3. Rabindranath Tagore, 'My Educational Mission'

And the following from Kshitis Roy [Ed.], The Visva Bharati Quarterly, Education Number. 1947, Santiniketan,

1. Binodebehari Mukherji, 'Teaching of Art to Children'
2. Nandalal Bose, 'A Primer for Art Education'
3. Jnanendranath Chattopadhyay, 'Rabindranath and his Asrama School'

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Art in School Education

Imaginative thinking may not be considered a skill, but it is more basic than most art skills. It is very difficult to teach in junior classes. They have their own fantasies in the art world. Entering this world is not an easy task. At the beginning of their art learning, some teacher may have asked them to draw some shape or fill up this shape with colour or to draw straight lines. Sometimes, they find this very boring and become less interested in their art classes. I usually give them a colourful landscape or funny picture with animals or human figure, colourful butterflies, paintings, etc. When it is their choice they are more likely to work hard because they care about it. Sometimes they do craft work also. I have noticed that they enjoy this activity more.

Generally students in the early teenage (from Classes VI to VIII) are allowed to choose what they like. Some students are interested while others are not. It is better to avoid surprising students with some work they are not prepared for. I try to give them some ideas on different topics for use in their sketch books. I always encourage them even when they are not doing well. Motivation is generally strongest when students own their ideas. This means that they have a say in important choices they make. When it is their choice they will do better work.

One of the important phases is when they enter higher classes, for example, class XII. At this time they develop their drawing skills, knowledge of art and colour sense. In those classes they have specific subjects like still life, imaginative painting, book cover-making, poster making, lino print etc. This part of the curriculum gives them some time to “play around” with materials. For example: the class has to do a painting in pastel colours over a transparent water colour composition. This part of the lesson is not art, it is an art skill or craft carefully presented by the teacher. Some students are impulsive and rush to finish without giving enough attention to important aspects of their work. I encourage them to develop more complex work. I use open



questions to raise issues for them to consider in their work. Their greatest need is thinking practice. When I ask for a suggestion, I first ask what

the student has been thinking about. Often the student already has an idea, but is not confident enough to try it. I encourage them by pointing out that some things are only learned by practice and more practice leads to better outcomes.

Over the past few years, I have conveyed my thinking to few students about the importance of art education in our life. Last year two class XII students wanted to pursue fashion designing in their degree course. The importance of art education in the development of a child’s overall personality and skills is undeniable. Art develops a child’s intelligence. It is observed that children, who are engaged in art activities, develop a better understanding of other subjects, right from languages to geography to even science. Studies have shown that exposure of children to art helps in promoting brain activity. A child learns how to solve problems. He also learns how to convey his thoughts and ideas in numerous ways. Art develops the overall personality of a child and builds a child’s self esteem and makes him disciplined. A child, due to his involvement in art, becomes much more creative and innovative and also learns how to cooperate with others. So to conclude, it can be said that art activities are a must for children’s personality development, intellectual growth and to improve their observational skills.



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04 When Art becomes the Artist...



Srivi Kalyan

Notes on the Sky Self

If we move beyond the limited worlds of assessment, employment and success, we will be ready to create art programmes that revolutionise the identity of each child.

Why do schools need art? But the other more serious, yet absurd, question is ‘What is really art?’ I like the absurdity of it. I went around asking friends and students what they thought art was. We had some really amazing conversations. All of us were confused and also rather excited trying to figure out this expanding universe of the arts.

‘My Art is my life’ said Mir Mukhtiyar Ali. ‘Physicists, mathematicians, sociologists, historians, craftsmen, and of course artists in the conventional sense - everyone seems to be an artist’ said I. ‘How does a blind child see art?’ asked Nancy Raj. ‘Colours soak into the paper’ said another friend, Jigeesha. Her words triggered an essential link in my mind about art as product and art as process. I asked myself a series of questions:

1. Is art the product or the process?
2. When does the process become the product?
3. And what really is the product of art - the work of art or the artist himself?

Expanding our definitions of the Arts

“As I begin to paint, hold the sky in your hands; as the stretch of my canvas is unknown to me.”
– M.F. Hussain

As teachers, parents, artists or viewers how do we define the arts? Our definitions characterise how we experience them, teach them or validate their neces-

sity in our everyday lives. We often come with preconceived notions about what we call as ‘proper art’, ‘good art’ and ‘bad art’. Further, we are also limited in our understanding of what art is? Is drawing mehendi design art or should we create a realistic painting? Is folk music sung by a fruit seller art or is art what is performed on a stage? Does the word include all forms of art, or is it just the classical arts like painting, sculpture, dance and theatre. Is craft also art? Simple yet profound questions plague our understanding of the arts we encounter every day.

Based on our preconceptions, we often create an environment where the arts cannot flourish, because they have been condemned before they were created. We have put ourselves into boxes like “artist”, “scientist”, “physicist”, “teacher”, “parent”. The moment we counter something that doesn’t quite fit into a box, we scramble, and try very hard to fit it in. From the elephant stuck in a cage to a child sitting quietly in a classroom, anything that doesn’t fit into a box seems like an aberration to us. But isn’t the box itself the aberration!

Neither art nor science could flourish if it did not give satisfaction, or if satisfaction were the only aim. Constable urged that painting is a science, and I suggest that science is a humanity. Putting them in opposition misconceives and hurts both. - Nelson Goodman



Reflect and Experiment

Take different kinds of paper - newspaper, used paper, paper with different grains and drop ink on it. If you have access to water-colours or coloured inks and a brush, try adding different amounts of water and paint on the paper. Do this exercise with children as well. Here are some questions that you can reflect on together.

What happens when colour soaks into paper? What can we really expect?

When do the colours really stop soaking into the paper; When the inks dry or when the paper ages; When the writer writes into it or when the silverfish make it their own? When it becomes a work of art or when the paper begins to crack into a million pieces? When it is framed or when it is viewed?

By expecting children to create a realistic drawing, or repeat music without building a personal connection to the notes, we are taking away from them the ability to soak into the arts, or undergo the process of artistic evolution. Without allowing experimentation and discovery, we are also taking away the interdisciplinary nature of understanding, by expecting them to remain in one frame while understanding a subject. There may be mathematicians who are brilliant artists, who find no way to explore their innate understanding of either subject. In the process of teaching, we are probably stunting their growth, because we do not understand how their cognition of either subject works.

Expanding our definitions of our Selves

Practice, perception, and the several arts are equally ways of gaining insight and understanding. The

naive notion that science seeks truth, while art seeks beauty, is wrong on many counts. Science seeks relevant, significant, illuminating principles, often setting aside trivial or overcomplicated truths in favor of powerful unifying approximations. And art, like science, provides a grasp of new affinities and contrasts, cuts across worn categories to yield new organization, new visions of the worlds we live in.
- Nelson Goodman

Art is much more than the product that it becomes, be it performance art or visual art. Art and artist evolve seamlessly through the artistic processes they undergo. Their journey adds to the multiple dimensions of the subtle mystic self as well as the political and social self in relationship with the world. Both as voice and language, the arts permeate human society and are critical to the perceptions we build of ourselves. In this essay, using the lens of four selves, let's look at how we can build a new case for the arts in our schools.

The Subtle Self

“The search for the meaning of life and of the self in life is born with the child and is desired by the child”.
- Carla Rinaldi

The arts provide us with road maps to our subtle self. When we experience art or create art, there are several internal journeys that we begin taking. Sometimes a swirl of colour evokes a meditative silence. At other times a raga, a note, an artist's voice, the dancer's construction of space and many other forms of art lead us into paths that resonate with a greater spirit that encompasses all of life. Sometimes looking through the microscope, looking through the macro lens of a camera opens up this world. We are suddenly removed from what we can comfortably explain as 'reality' to many subtle realities that exist beyond our consciousness.

“I was all alone on the beach looking for pictures, when suddenly it happened. As dimensions of time and space vanished, I slowly dissolved in the fathomless blue. Something confined within the narrow shell of my mind and body was hurled into a whirlpool of ecstasy” - Ashvin Mehta

Challenge

Using observation, interpretation and empathy to understand the subtle self

Simple activities like looking at a leaf and drawing it can open a subtle world. Nurture the child's innate curiosity while giving them this exercise.

- *How closely can you look at a leaf?*
- *How many things can your naked eye see?*
- *What more can you see under the microscope?*
- *Can we look at a leaf through an ant's eye!*
- *Let's try drawing pictures of both.*
- *Talk about how you felt when you looked at the leaf. How do you think the leaf might have felt when you looked at it?*

Open-ended questions that challenge both their emotional and cognitive understandings can challenge their viewpoints providing new ways to understand and experience their world.

This subtle self is important for us to evolve as human beings, and discover compassion within ourselves. It also creates space in the mind, allowing us to create anew. So, how can we educate the subtle self? Can we create a space in our classrooms that allows for this quest for the self, through aesthetics as well as cognition?

The Social Self

The grass seeks her crowd in the earth. The tree seeks his solitude of the sky. - Rabindranath Tagore

Each of us is simultaneously in a web of relationships. There is complexity and simplicity in each relationship we make during the course of our lives, be it with other human beings or with nature, objects or abstract ideas. Our relationships at once encompass feelings, reasoning, deep emotions, discoveries, practice, learning, conflicts and resolutions.

Expanding awareness about the intricate tapestry of this social self can help children rediscover themselves at every turn in their lives.

Explore together

Using abstraction, comparison and interaction to understand the social self

Ask children to create music with simple everyday objects around them. Ask them to listen carefully and hear how each note is interacting with the things around them.

Ask them to start using their bodies to make more sounds. Encourage them to reflect on how sounds interact with their minds and hearts.

Map the pathways in which the sounds travelled on the board. Talk to them about dimensions, atoms, metaphors.

Ask each child to draw this experience or write about this experience. Then gently suggest that they can create another drawing imagining all the people and creatures in their life are sounds. Watch for the interesting connections they start making about relationships and the fine art of living.



The Political Self

“Little one, don’t be afraid of this dark night. Walk boldly as you see the truth and light. Love well, my child, laugh all day long, But do not take from any man his song.” - Ruskin Bond, Rain in the mountains

Create together: Using reflection, compassion and research to understand the political self

Ask children to write a play together that takes into account some of their differences and some of their similarities. Ask them to imagine that they are all different creatures. They have all come together to set up a school. What kind of a school will they create together? Ask each team to deliberate on a different problem. One team could work with architecture, another team could work with teaching methods, yet another team could work with policies and governance.

Even very young children in first and second grades can have simple yet profound thoughts on a topic like this.

Every child is also constantly building an identity for herself that is political in nature. Gender, community, culture, religion, nationality, globalisation, media – each of these impose a political self on the child. Construction of the political self is a tough challenge for it takes into account history, interpretation of past, present and future. Even something as straightforward as drawing a tree can have so many influences of our unconscious political self. Engaging the child in thoughtful creation of art, writing or reflection by carefully considering the elements that constitute his thinking is important to construct a compassionate and meaningful political self.

The Sky Self

In the wild wet wind jasmines revel in their own perfume. The cloud-hidden stars thrill in secret.

Let me fill my heart to the full with nothing but my own depth of joy. - Rabindranath Tagore

What if our self was not limited to our accepted notions! What if it was a sky self, what voice would it have? What colours would it be made of? The sky in the sky-self is just a metaphor for an unknown expanse. The sky-self can be an adventurous and powerful companion that allows a child to evolve and discover her potential without feeling limited.

Our definitions limit our ideas about ourselves. A group of 8, 9 and 10 year olds did a writing exercise on the topic –“If I am me, who am I?” From being human beings with two hands, face, nose, ears, girl or boy, we suddenly opened up and became as large as the universe, as tiny as ants. We started making noises of animals; we burst into ecstatic declarations of how many different things we could be. We discovered that when we feel different emotions we may have different heads. We suddenly found malleability, flexibility to our bodies and minds. It was an exercise in empathy for oneself. Children have

Choreograph: Using imagination, space, and exploration to understand the sky self

Suggest to children that they could be sky-people for the day. Ask them to walk around the school, dance together, whisper or shout as sky people would.

Work in teams for each group to explore strange objects, planets and challenges they might encounter in space, by dancing around them, through them, above or below them.

Choreograph a dance piece titled “Sky-self” with your students. Ask them how big it is, how many things it can hold, what kind of music they associate with it and why? Each of these explorations will lead to opening up their minds and bodies to a new way of living.



become so tuned to learning to please their parents or their teachers, getting good marks in their exams, being imaginative and creative inside a box that limits them, that just reaching into their own self becomes impossible.

“Nature uses only the longest threads to weave her patterns, so each small piece of her fabric reveals the organisation of the entire tapestry.” - Richard P. Feynman

Each child reveals a mystery of humanity. Nurturing each child to see how he or she reveals this magnificent tapestry of life is a challenge that teachers, parents and schools face. In the arts, children get many strategies, approaches, ideas and paths to discover this for themselves. However, for such discoveries to happen, our approach to the arts must embrace their interdisciplinary nature at one level. At another level,



we need to open our eyes and see that the artistic processes are also cognitive in nature. They challenge, teach and nurture our thinking and help us evolve in several dimensions. If we move beyond the limited worlds of assessment, employment and success, we will be ready to create art programmes that revolutionise the identity of each child.

I leave you to ponder over the questions:

1. What is art?
2. Is art the product or the process?
3. When does the process become the product?
4. And what really is the product of art- the work of art or the artist herself?



SRIVI is an educator, writer, designer, illustrator. She has authored, co-authored and illustrated books and stories for children and adults.. She uses the arts in education to create meaningful learning experiences. She is the Founder-Director of Fooniferse Arts Pvt. Ltd (www.fooniferse.com). You can view her works on her website: www.sriviliveshere.com. She can be contacted at srivikalyan@fooniferse.com



05

How Art Develops Children's Critical Abilities

Deepshika Khaitan

Art to a layman means the picture he sees in the magazine or poster or canvas. That is not true. That is only the image, Art is much more.

What is Art ?

It is a holistic visual experience involving a multi – sensory dimension. If for understanding we break it up into the various senses involved then we are talking of:

- the visual experience via the eyes
- the motor experience of hand-eye coordination needed to reproduce what is seen.
- the cognitive experience which breaks down this image in our mind to be able to understand the shape, colour, size, subject etc.
- the emotional experience which is your individual reaction to an image – and that is what distinguishes a mediocre painting from a masterpiece. When collectively a work draws an emotional reaction from everyone it becomes a “MONALISA”

My interest in art dates back to the first time I formally started studying the subject in standard IX in 1995, when we were given the option of choosing art as a subject to appear for ICSE Examinations.

Having completed school, I pursued my interest in art by joining the Fine Arts Department, in Stella Maris College, Chennai where I graduated with honors in History of Art, Drawing and Painting.

Moving to Kolkata, after marriage, I soon began teaching art to children. It was not a planned or thought out decision to teach, but happened by

chance. I still remember, some friends who happened to see my works hanging on the walls insisted that I start teaching art, maybe even begin with their children.. After much resistance, I agreed, I was a bit nervous to begin with, but the children took me by pleasant surprise.

Art fosters creativity and thought. Children are very receptive and sensitive by nature, and with exposure and attention to detail, are able to recreate the stimuli as they see it.

Young minds feel confident and happy through little achievements in their art work.

For example sometime back in the classroom we were talking about world unrest and terror. The children expressed their feelings through the medium of painting. Works created were thought provoking and individualistic.

Similarly, a professional Kathak dancer posed for the children as they sketched her





The Creativity that flowed and the ability to take on and develop a subject after an initial stimuli is reflected in the works above.

Another point that I would like to mention is the use of colour. Children from an early age start associating different colours with different emotions. For eg. Red with anger, white with peace, use of warm colours like yellows and oranges for summers and cool colours like blues and greens for winters. **The Ability to correlate is developed.**

Art often proves to be a catalyst for young imagination. It is we who distinguish between the PAINTER and the WRITER but the young often invent their own story to complete a picture; “The little girl must be awaiting her mother....Maybe he has a worried look because he sees danger....”

The younger children enjoy creating their own imaginary character or animal, giving it a name and making it as realistic as possible.

The sub conscious mind is tapped. After studying the works of famous surrealist artist, children represented the extremities in human nature. Often children enjoy recollecting their dreams and putting them on paper.

Art captures motion. A prime example of this is seen in the movies. Wherein initially pictures were drawn and then made to move. Similarly children were made to capture wind on canvas, therefore evoking their sense of feel along with sight.



Taking into account my experiences as a teacher, I would like to share some techniques and tips that I at **Colours of Innocence** have adopted in dealing with its students.

Classes are conducted with the idea of giving the children a free will, with certain guidelines to follow which is to help them create more effectively.

They are made to think more for themselves than to copy. Old masters are studied and it is encouraged to emulate the techniques more than the subject itself.

Imagination along with group work is initiated.

For e.g. We had a lesson plan wherein children created and painted imaginary characters. To take it a step further they even dressed up as their own characters. Later they got together to come up with a story based on these imaginary beings which was enacted into a play by them.

Also they are made to view works by other artists, whether through books, internet or ongoing exhibitions. It is encouraged that they borrow ideas from what they have seen to use in their own work.

Sketch or quickly jot down anything that they like whether in class or outdoors.

Another important aspect to learning is taking out a few moments to review what one has created. Children are made to talk about their work, what it depicts, their thoughts behind it, their use of colour and it is an open house for any other student to make suggestions on improvement or appreciate what they like.



My sincere advise to all those who are reading this article is creativity has to be nurtured and allowed to grow not regulated. There is no perfect way to draw or paint and we as their guides should aim at children creating their own individual styles and being confident not only of their art work but also of themselves. This confidence can only come in when they are taking their own little decisions on the choices they make whether its colour , medium, subject etc. without being rebuked for it.



A warm day painted by a 3 year old.

To understand the role of art further in childrens everyday lives, lets read what some parents have to say:

I would like to quote a few words by Mrs. Sangeetha Gupta, parent of an eight year old girl,

“ We give crayons to our kids when they are barely two but formal art classes at a young age, in my view do have a positive and lasting impact on the evolution of children. My daughter started art classes with Deepshikha when she was 4 or 5 and today at 8+ I see a distinct mark of this class on her overall personality.

For her, drawing anything comes naturally it may not be perfect but her strokes are always bold and confident and there’s never a ‘No’ to drawing

anything, infact she prefers to draw rather than paste pictures downloaded from the net.

Independence of thought has also been skillfully inculcated in her and this is evident not only in her drawings which are never the same as she does in class but in various decisions made by her appropriate to her age.

The impression of colours is another lasting mark which I can see in my daughter. She is very comfortable with and confident about colours not only in her drawings but also in her clothes, accessories or other belongings that she chooses and is specific about.

The moulding of my daughter through ‘Art’ is constant and Deepshikha, as her art teacher, has a very important role to play in it.”

Another view point by a parent, Mrs. Neetika Swarup,

“ A child who did not want to draw anything now preferred to sit and sketch, draw and paint. The visual languages have now become a part of her daily life.

The beauty of a birds colour, the flowers in the garden even the structure of a building have become a part of my daughter. Creativity today holds immense importance in the world of all information available on your fingertips to be able to make – to get inspired is very essential and I have seen this become a part of Siddhika.”

Certain changes in behaviour that I would like to bring forth is often one sees children emerge out of their shell, those who are extremely shy come out to speak and discuss their art in class. Also the openness to adapt to new thought and doing away with pre-conceived ideas is stirred.

I would like to conclude this article in the words of Confucius, which best explain the role of art in human life.

“What I hear, I forget.

What I see, I remember.

What I do, I understand.”

- Confucius

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My Perspective



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My USP to generate interest in art stems from a simple understanding that art is within you as good as it is around you. I have adopted the method of making the student understand, respect and experience the values and ethics of the process of art and culminating this whole process into a product. The best method to start art with any young budding minds is sand art or a collage using wastes around you. I have personally seen a tremendous positive impact on the young minds in being interested in art through this activity. They get very enthused to innovate and create expressions using the stuff they see around. This helps them improve their creativity and also to realize that art needs no specific tool to express. Another important aspect is to provide freedom. Art is not defined without freedom of expression. I encourage giving direction to an artist’s mind rather than limiting and drawing horizons to his flow of thoughts. I encourage learning and teaching all different media and styles to encourage every student to learn, understand, practice and develop their own individual style and identity without any bias induced by me. The practice is done both on an individual and group wise to induce collaborative spirit and exchange of ideas.

I am glad and very proud to share that Kim Jin Moo (my student) from South Korea has taken up art as a profession.

Art teaches you to observe, meditate, ponder, search, create and express your thoughts on an issue which sharpens any young mind to be an individual who will be prepared to meet the technical, analytical and mental challenges in their personal and professional lives. These attributes are essential in any sphere of life or profession which makes the learning easier and interesting for folks learnt in art. Art also teaches you to see things in a different way and to give new dimension to your thinking. This helps in understanding and dealing with the problems in a creative way and this attribute is essential in everybody’s life. I see and urge art to be included as a serious subject in the curriculum to help students be better individuals for tomorrow.

06 Aesthetics in Everyday Life

Tarit Bhattacharjee

The concept of using everyday materials in creating artefacts has a strong impact on education.

“The light in the distant eastern sky in a remote northeast village, my vivid memory of an unknown dawn filled with pearl fabric winter dew-- a wave of nostalgia hits me as the image of a bale of dry hay kept in a comfortable corner of a courtyard emerges. A few huts close together on the path around, the whole landscape changing through the seasons, wearing a new look every three months, vibrant seasonal changes—scenes infused with nostalgia. Ponds, mango and palm groves around paddy fields in green, ochre and brown tints—my vision takes a journey beyond the distant horizon and my eyes rest in an unknown perspective.”

Village folk with a sense of strong aesthetic seem to be natural in everyday life. Dawn to dusk, a generation grows up with ample natural resources for which skills, craftsmanship and creativity seem a natural instinct. In this journey, perhaps every generation could explore methods and materials from everyday resources.

Older generations created a relationship between the inner and outer, integrated skills and material, built huts, designed tools, worked with an intelligent touch of craftsmanship and used natural resources like



clay which was abundant. Man’s journey began by holding stones, clay and twigs, creating out of them form and design. Centuries later, the invention of the wheel gradually started moving through unknown generations. Industrialisation began for human comfort and easy living became the need of the hour. In this state of comfort, man slowly left behind his ability to labour and stay in touch with the ‘manual’. A new generation emerged who began an entirely new language and looked for a comfort zone. Technology produced a new generation of technocrats and as the world became faster and faster, man became a victim of technology: man lost his intelligence, became clever and started playing tricks. Subsequently, technology has occupied the inner space, and made it difficult to integrate the inner and outer spaces.

Integration between inner and outer spaces requires a keenness to observe nature and its resources and an innovative watchfulness: this, in turn, will help in integrating methods and materials. Natural resources and abundant waste material could give a wider sense of recycling materials and create a sense of utilization.

Rejection due to non-acceptance or by choice is common to any tradition or system. In relationships rejection plays an important role. In everyday life we abandon very useful things from our immediate surroundings.

The need of the hour is that our education system must embrace an intelligent inclusion, not exclusion. Perhaps future generations could visualise a new per-



spective - rejection is a gradual process of violence and it begins here.

I would like to share my own experience of growing up in the countryside of the northeast. Similar surroundings can be found anywhere. For instance, when one walks through one's surroundings, one might come across quite a few things which are abandoned—a coconut shell, for example, could be shaped into a mask. In the same way, anything could be designed from the waste around. There are plenty of things in our environment which one could call “Everyday Material”.

Plenty of resources are available in our environment: clay, for example, is moulded by hand coordination which is a natural instinct. The hand gives shape and creates design very naturally. Holding clay awakens the senses to touch; the whole experience is one of natural feeling and touch and could be termed ‘electrifying’. The pleasure of tying hay together and creating shapes is another such experience. Through these experiences, one learns to integrate methods and materials.

Clay, mud, stones, chips, old newspaper, cardboard, boxes, coconut shells, sawdust, bottle containers are available in plenty from our everyday life. Plastics, as we all know, have created a huge environmental disaster as they are not biodegradable. We cannot recycle them and dump them, littering our surroundings. Since this plastic could be reused, why not use it differently? Cutting out masks, placing them in these plastic bags and displaying them against a black or dark background is one such way.

Looking for aesthetics and creative order makes a difference in everyday life. It requires a strong sense of observation, watchfulness and an intuition for the creative urge which gives shape to the resources around.

Thunder after the star at dusk and the native folk take a stroll around a mango grove, gathering twigs

and branches along with tender mangoes—a nostalgic recollection of the early days of my upbringing. The native folk could create a hanging linear sculpture against the mud walls with these treasures from the mango grove—a brilliant sense of aesthetics, an experience beyond craftsmanship.

The inner self has a peace which goes back a million years. Man began his journey through a path in wild



grass. This primitive space still exists in the inner space of human existence. This intelligence helps to continue this journey with keen observation. With this intelligence, one could possibly explore nature and its resources around and not always depend on technology.

A system could explore creative and innovative space for learning which fundamentally is self-learning. To





create space for observation, give shape from the resources around, one can make toys tying hay or masks from coconut shells. Perhaps one could use easily available newspaper; also, one could explore sculptural dimensions from a bottle container; cardboard could integrate different areas of education. Aesthetic is basically an integral part of our creative upbringing in education.



Traditionally in the Indian context, a child grows in a strong fold of oral tradition, religious and social celebrations which are basically colourful and have a tremendous impact on creative growth. This ambience is part of an endless journey.

One could observe and possibly understand the possibility of using particular objects which are available in the environment as resources. The concept of using everyday materials in creating artefacts has a strong impact on education. Using recycling posi-

tively needs conscious effort; the economy of using waste material leads to an aesthetic understanding of everyday life as a whole, a down-to-earth feeling, an innocence, a spontaneity and energy, perhaps a true intelligence.

Man has always tried to explore memory and tap it as a resource which creates a link between object and reality. For instance, a scarecrow in a field near a small stream creates an ambience which generates a wider perspective beyond the horizon.

My memory again turns back to an unknown dawn, a vivid part of a haystack in a courtyard — an inspiration, energy, a journey that still continues.



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Vyjayanthi Shankar
Archana Dwivedi

World over education policies almost always recognise the value of co-scholastic areas, such as arts and sports, in providing quality education to students. But what constitutes good education and a quality learning environment? One view focuses on the marks achieved in the core subjects and other immediately measurable outcomes. The other view is the 'ability' of the school to create a good educational experience.

Quality education frameworks put forward by international organisations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and Asian Development Bank, usually refer to a more holistic definition of quality education encompassing scholastic, co-scholastic and affective (values and attitudes) outcomes for students. India's National Curriculum Framework (2005) emphasises art, health, physical education and peace education apart from cognitive learning outcomes (for eg. math, science, language). It draws attention to the factors or parameters that contribute to schooling outcomes (e.g. infrastructure, libraries and other media, school organisation and culture) and also emphasises the importance of learning experiences beyond outcomes. So what constitutes good education?

Wipro and Educational Initiatives (EI) jointly conceptualised the Quality Education Study (QES) which has been planned as a multi-year study to expand the meaning of 'quality' in education to include educational outcomes beyond student performance in subjects; and study the attributes of different learning environments (schools) which are considered as good.

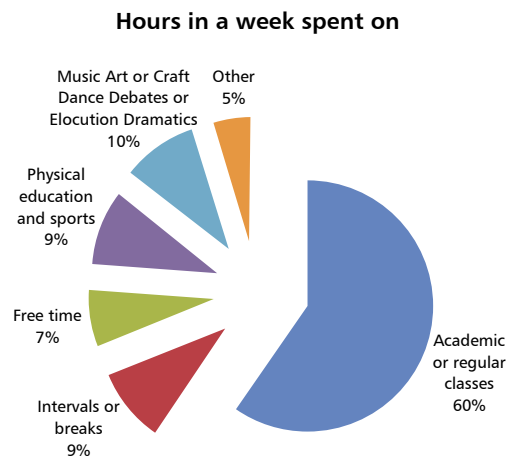
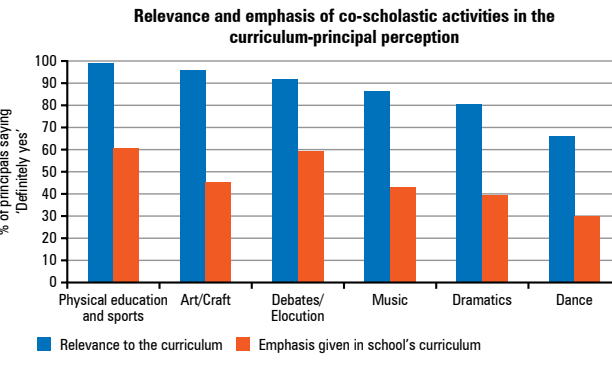
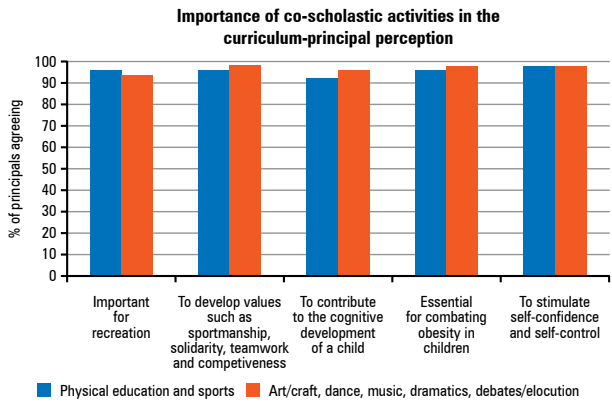
The first year study was carried out in a few 'top' English medium schools in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. The grading was done on the basis of a public opinion survey. Six schools - not restricted to these five metro cities - recommended by experts as schools providing different learning environments were also included in the study. Overall the study covered 23,000 students, 790 teachers and 54 principals from 89 schools. Students of classes 4, 6 and 8 were assessed through a test which consisted of objective, multiple-choice questions in English, Mathematics, Environmental Science and Social Studies. The questions tested conceptual understanding and acquisition of higher order skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and application. Background questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews with principals helped in collecting information on various factors related to learning environments, values and attitudes of students.

Here are some interesting findings from the study:

Principals' Perception on Co-scholastic Skills and Curriculum

More than 70% of principals said that co-scholastic areas were very relevant to curriculum and for building students' self-confidence, self-control, sportsmanship, solidarity, teamwork, competitiveness, health, etc. However, less than half among them mentioned that their school placed major emphasis on curriculum for these areas, indicating that what was being said was not often practiced. This was also corroborated by the

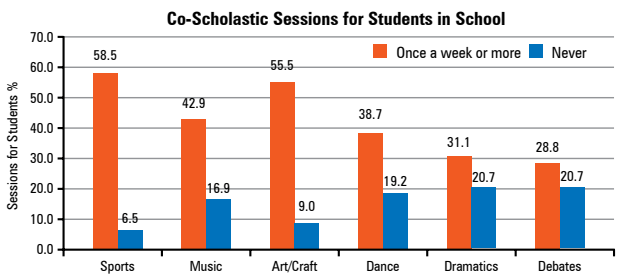
fact that nearly 30% of students who answered the student questionnaire said that there were hardly any sports sessions; similar was the case for music (45%), art (30%), dance (50%) and drama 57%) and debates (60%).



School Time and Frequency of Co-Scholastic Activity in School

Schools on an average in a week spent 9% of their

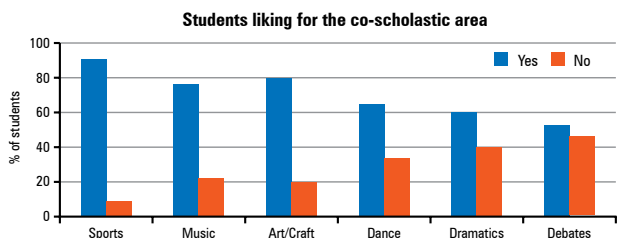
time on physical education/sports, 10% collectively on co-scholastic activities like music/art/dance/ elocution/dramatics, and 60% on learning academic subjects. While 40-60% of students reported having sessions in school for sports, art/craft and music once a week or more, 16-20% of students said that they never got a chance to practice dramatics, dance, debate or music; 6.5% never practiced art/craft and 9.0% never practiced sports.



School Resources for Co-Scholastic Activities

The responses of principals on the quality of service in terms of equipment, ground/room, instructor/coach and competitions for co-scholastic activities showed that:

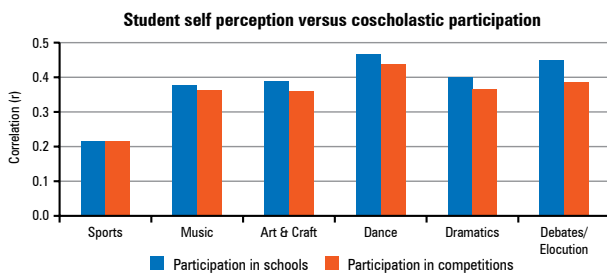
- Almost all the schools tested rated themselves as good or excellent (*average scale score of 4 or above out of 5*) in the quality of the services (instrument/ material, room/auditorium, and availability of instructor) in the co-scholastic areas.
- Dance, sport, debates and art had slightly higher facilities than dramatics or music.
- Students were also participating slightly more in inter-school competitions than intra-school competitions.



Student's Liking, Perception about their Abilities and Participation

Less than 20% of students said that they did not like co-scholastic activities such as sports, art and music, while dance, dramatics and debates were disliked by 35-47% of students.

Data was also collected to check whether the self-concept students have about co-scholastic abilities translates into their participation in the same.

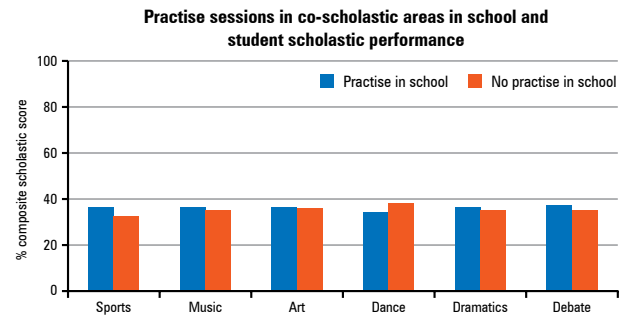
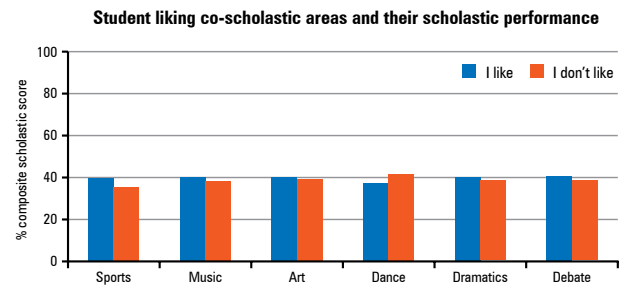


While students' perception of their own co-scholastic abilities and their participation was moderately correlated in dance, debates, dramatics, art and music, there was comparatively low correlation between students' perception about their ability in sports and their actual participation in sports ($r = 0.2$).

Relationship between Co-Scholastic and Scholastic Performance

The study did not reveal any major significant differences in scholastic performance of students liking co-scholastic areas and those who did not, although students who liked sports did better in their subject tests too than those who said they did not like sports [difference statistically significant, but the magnitude meaningfully small (Cohen's d)]. Similarly, there were no significant differences observed in scholastic performance of students who said that they practiced co-scholastic areas in schools and those who did not.

While majority of schools and classrooms studied contributed to the above scenario, a few atypical schools were found giving equal importance



to co-scholastic skills. In one school, students reported that they spent equal time learning arts, pottery, music etc., in an environment more close to nature where they also fed birds, went for nature walk, climbed trees which helped them to relax and experience things. The students of another school enjoyed coming to school most of the times. They prefer alternative professions. They also liked extra-curricular classes which were 2-3 sessions a week. Both the schools cited here were among the best performers in scholastic areas in the study.

Discussion: Research points out that students who proceed through schools that have a higher focus on arts have better scholastic performance and also do well in acquisition of social values and attitudes (Catteral, UCLA). Involvement in arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skills. Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork and can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing, forging social bonds and community cohesion (Rand Corporation, 2005).



The QES study did not find conclusive relationships between co-scholastic curriculum and the scholastic performance of students. The reasons could be that our schools are doing so little in the co-scholastic area - less than 10% of total class time is devoted to equipping our children in all of arts, music, dance, dramatics and debates - that one cannot expect any relationship with scholastic performance. It also brings to question whether all education must be justified for their usefulness in transfer, taking place to doing math or other subjects well. Art education should be considered for its own merit and should be taught for art sake and not be justified on the basis of any transfer.

Arts is an important part of any culture, and our children, if they do not acquire ability in some art form or the other, cannot be considered as ones who have had all-rounded and quality education. Most principals interviewed said that education quality was about providing holistic education to students and various co-scholastic areas were critical for this. This, however, did not translate into emphasis or actual transactions in the school curriculum.

The focus group discussions with students and teachers revealed that most of the younger kids aspire to be in arts or sports, while the older ones wanted to be in business or technical jobs like engineers. Schools also refer to arts or sports when they refer to co-curricular activity (CCA). No teacher, student, principal said that they lacked CCA but there were no examples of anyone being given sufficient exposure in school to excel in these areas. The pressures for a utilitarian education over the years and the need for doing well economically in life has conditioned our society to provide for education that is either devoid of arts or has so little of it, that it as well be considered nonexistent.

Society should take cognisance of the fact that we are depriving our children from acquiring unique ways of expression that can bring beauty, sweetness and enjoyment to their lives. Cultures which have ignored arts have nurtured an impoverished society and we are well on the way to becoming one if we do not do something about this in our schools.

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Teaching visual arts at school - Radhika Neelakantan

I write this article asking a few questions and giving some possible answers.

Why do I teach art?

I teach art because light, colour, form, texture, lines and strokes have such an enduring impact on me that I want to share my joy and experiences with the children.

Why should a child do art?

There are many theories about this. Visual and performing arts are believed to improve academic skills. I don't know if this is true but it definitely improves art skills!! Art skills are not measurable. "Art intelligence" may include a wide variety of skills that may be needed to live sanely. It may not be apparent in itself but one does not need statistical evidence to see the importance of art in education. A child must do art because it is a beautiful thing to do.

How do I teach art?

As a practicing artist, I find the constant shift between teaching art and doing my own work very refreshing. The combination of art and children is a wonderful thing. Each feeds the other and there is a seamlessness that exists between the two.

On the practical side, a teacher must multitask (sharpen pencils, at the same time watch the class and also help someone who is "stuck"). Effective communication with all kinds of students is necessary. The teacher has to make this a priority.

The activities may be the usual activities but the ideas behind them have to be fluid. While I have not fixed what I do at each grade, I can say that over their academic career, they are exposed to a variety of ideas so that there is a balance. What works with one group may not work with other groups at that particular time. So, I usually begin from where they are. In the first month, I actually discuss with them what they would like to do. I usually lead them from there to everything else that we do for the rest of the year.

When early in the year, the child draws something very clichéd, I tell them that they can draw something in a particular way only once. We have group discussions at the beginning of the class. This helps each child to hear the ideas of the other children and also to change their own ideas as they listen to the others. After the discussion, the child's creative magic unfolds and moves on its own. There is little the teacher has to do!

We usually begin and end the year drawing portraits.

Each child has a partner who will sit for the other and vice versa. Importance is given to shapes, line and colour and not the "eyes" or the "nose". This, I have found to be an exercise that offers immediate understanding of the kind of observation that is required. I stress the importance of looking at the subject more than the sketch one is doing on the paper. I am satisfied if careful looking is happening.

I do not stock the art room with excessive art material. Things are bought in moderate amounts and used with care. I try to inculcate in the child the need to keep waste to a minimum. We generally do not use a lot of material to make a quick work and then discard the paper.

I do not ask them to finish something in a specified time. I make time an issue only if I find that they are not focusing on their task. If they want to take a break, they may do so but need to always finish a particular task before moving on to something else. Sometimes they can go on to something else but will have to come to finish what they hadn't earlier.

I shall not say that the atmosphere in my art class is "non-judgmental" but rather that it is gently judgmental. It is in this quiet atmosphere that comments are made, with a sense of peace and fun.

The organization of materials and the storing of students' work is also an important aspect. I involve the children in this. When the children know where and how materials are kept, they can also be counted upon to keep the place tidy. Learning and experiencing in the art class includes keen observation, visual and spatial abilities, reflection, self criticism or evaluation and experimenting. All the art work is usually displayed in the art room, where all the walls have display areas. Art work is also displayed in public spaces like the kitchen or the library where more viewership is possible.

Exposure to artists, past and present, is another thing that is important. Visits to galleries and museums are also a vital part of a child's art education.

Finally, one might wonder about how much time should be devoted to art. It should be all the time available. Everything we do should be a work of art!

Radhika Neelakantan has been teaching Art at Centre for Learning, Bangalore, for the past 19 years.

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Section B

Some Perspectives



Sanjna Kapoor

It is amazing that hardly 10-days go by without my meeting someone who has fond memories of my grandparents, Geoffrey and Laura Kendal, and their theatre company, Shakespeareana, that would annually visit schools across the country bringing the magic of Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw and other contemporary playwrights to school and college children. The experience of these performances left an indelible impression on a generation of English school-going children. This was in the 1950's and '60's. To quote from Geoffrey Kendal's book, *The Shakespeare Wallah*, "We were among the most rewarding audiences in the world; rows of intelligent Indian school girls gazed at the drama with startled absorption, drinking in every word and gesture."

I grew up with stories either of Shakespearean plays or my grandparents' amazing adventures across India. And these stories were always dotted with encounters with principals who lead outstanding educational institutions.

I went to a school in Bombay that was unique for its times – it was non-competitive - exams began after the VI STD, each child was looked upon individually and not as some trophy the school has to hold up for itself at the end of 12 years. I was fortunate. Fortunate that the school understood my drawbacks and my potential and just let me be.

I personally went through an extraordinary experience with regards to mathematics in the IX STD and this changed my life and my self-esteem! But that is another story. However, I do believe all this lead to my deep interest in education, and in particular what the arts can do to a child.

Twenty-two years ago I began a small programme (that has grown over the years) at Prithvi Theatre – Summertime with Prithvi Theatre, Creative Workshops and Plays for Children. This programme now comes under the new organisation, Junoon, and is called Arts at Play.

The aim of this programme was very clear – to develop an appreciative and discerning audience for theatre. To get kids to fall in-love with theatre. And the side effects were all the wonderful benefits in the development of a child and impacts on their personality, etc. But that was not central to our aims.

Today with Arts at Play, developing the value of the arts in our lives is central to our aims. So engaging with kids, and those who are their decision makers, i.e. their parents and schools, is critical for us. I shall not go into how we propose to do this in this article – but we have plans!

I give you this background because I feel it is necessary to know where I am coming from with my strong beliefs and assumptions with regards Arts in Education.

I think it is critical for us to articulate why we believe the arts are important in a child's education – what is it that they bring to the fore? How we believe this should happen and what it would take to enable this.

Alfred North Whitehead, the English mathematician who became a philosopher, says,

"Art is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern."



It is this aesthetic engagement that is critical, more so today than ever before, as critical as the joyful engagement with education.

Why do we believe the experience or understanding and appreciation of arts would make a difference to a child's life?

The arts have transformative powers. Arts, and especially performative arts have the ability to open up windows of new or different perspectives. Immersing you in experiential learning. It is these powers that need to be tapped to develop a more holistic person. It is quite terrifying the way our world today is churning out specialists who have no broad engagement, understanding or interest in the world at large. Steve Jobs once said, "A lot of people in our industry haven't had very diverse experiences. So they don't have enough dots to connect, and they end up with very linear solutions without a broad perspective on the problem. The broader one's understanding of the human experience, the better design we will have".

The arts can contribute to this non-linear way of thinking, of igniting the imagination. Albert Einstein said "Imagination is more important than knowledge..." and "It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education."!!!!

So how are we to bring this world of the arts to our children? Through formal and non-formal education.

I believe we need to have a world where both these opportunities are available and accessible to us – the formal structures within the educational system and those without, which are public. But both have very

clear mandates of enhancing *exposure* to the arts and *experience* of the arts.

So how do we go about establishing these two distinct ways in which the arts will engage our youth? Within the educational institution framework? And in the public arena? What is to be done?

"An aesthetic experience is one in which your senses are operating at their peak, when you are present in the current moment, when you are resonating with the excitement of this thing that you are experiencing, when you are fully alive"

- Ken Robinson

A few years ago I was invited by the NCERT to a meeting that was looking at the syllabus

of theatre in schools, in response to the recent initiation of theatre in the curriculum. It was the most chaotic meeting I have ever been to! What shocked me the most was the complete lack of coherence between the groups dealing with their specific age-groups. There seemed to be no over arching philosophy or approach that was decided on what would work through all the various ages. Till date we wait to see this syllabus.

But there is something so terribly wrong at the core of this idea. If a school hires an art teacher or a music teacher – surely you can see if they can paint/draw or sing/play a musical instrument. And yet this does not guarantee an ability to ignite enthusiasm and interest in these subjects. When a school hires a drama teacher – what do they look for? And where is this person trained?

So I believe a huge emphasis needs to be given to the training of arts teachers – drama, art, music and literature too!

And a constant reconnect to why we want arts in schools. If we are clear that we want the arts to develop a child's creativity, exploration, innovation



– and through this to enhance the child’s confidence and self esteem, and broaden their world view, then we shall work a certain way. But if we want the child to be up on stage at every school function and to be part of every competition to win accolades for the school, then we sadly, have a very different approach.

I am of course interested in the former.

As well as having well trained arts teachers in educational institutions we need regular exposure of the professional arts to children, both through school engagements and outside.

There are countries where it is mandatory that schools take their children to the theatre every month! And likewise theatre groups that are funded by the state have to have had a certain number of school children attend their shows. It is built into government policy!

There are also countries where every neighborhood has a theatre, gallery and children’s theatre too!

There are three inspiring stories (all from the Southern Hemisphere!) that I shall share with you...

Brent van Rensburg & Laurence Esteres’ *Zip Zap Circus* in South Africa. Begun over 20 years ago, this circus school ensured that the kids in a really rough neighbourhood of Cape Town stayed away from sniffing glue and turning to crime by introducing them to the world of the circus. This work developed through life skills – trust, honesty, responsibility, teamwork, discipline. And has impacted the environment of the neighbourhood tremendously. Zip Zap performs regularly. And today many of Zip Zap’s ex-students are performing with the highly acclaimed *Cirque du Soliel*.

Venezuela’s *El Systema* was started about 35 years ago by a musician Jose Abreu to teach music to slum children. El Systema has touched the lives of thou-

sands of children and brought in a sense of dignity and self worth not only in the children but in their families as well. This programme, started by an individual, has the support of the government. Today these musicians are amongst the most coveted musicians of the world’s symphonic orchestras.

Brazil’s SESC, Community Cultural & Sports Centres, were started over 60 years by the business community – who needed to ensure that their employees, a majority of whom were migrants from across the world, had food for the soul! The business houses set out to develop this system of cultural hubs by financing them with a 1.5% cess of their employees’ salaries. This enabled all their employees free use of the facilities, with a small charge for non-employees. This system was introduced into the Brazilian Constitution and is mandatory by law, even today. Danillo Miranda, SESC’s regional director, says: “SESC is not only a cultural or sports institution. It is a social welfare institution which uses every possible strategy to promote the people’s development and quality of life. The very base of welfare projects has to do with giving value to the human being, who deserves respect within a standard of absolute equality. This is not a matter of religion or politics. It is about culture. From a cultural point of view we are all fundamentally equal.” Sao Paulo that has a population of 30 million people has over 30 SESC projects across the city and with an annual turn out of:-

- Theatre: 3,968 (807,000 people)
- Music concerts: 405 (2,150,000 people)
- Dance: 656 (310,000 people)

Can you imagine a time in India when our business community contributes fundamentally to the development of cultural community spaces – not as their advertising or CSR programme, without wanting their name to it, but in the true belief of the impact such spaces will have on the quality of life!

“Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.” - Jawaharlal Nehru



As Steve Jobs said, *“Technology alone is not enough. It’s technology married with liberal arts, married with humanities, that yields the results that make our hearts sing.”*

In anticipation of a world full of singing hearts!

“Man is unique not because he does science, and he is unique not because he does art, but because science and art equally are expressions of his marvelous plasticity of mind.”

- Jacob Bronowski,
Scientist, formerly of the
Salk Institute



SANJNA has been heading Prithvi Theatre since 1990. In her time there, she has regularly curated an exciting theatre calendar, challenged Mumbai theatre groups with festivals demanding new work, toured festivals, presented theatre at other Mumbai venues and introduced an arts outreach programme for children. She has also expanded Prithvi Theatre into a broader cultural hub by bringing other disciplines (poetry, science, documentaries and short films, etc.) into an ongoing Prithvi calendar, and running an art gallery to present young and established artists. Most recently she initiated the India Theatre Forum, an all-India network of theatre practitioners. She is also Director of Junoon. Junoon is her platform to take her innovations for theatre to audiences beyond Prithvi. She can be contacted at sanjna@junoontheatre.org

**09**

Learning to see, awakening the senses

Jinan

The biggest concern about the present main stream education is that it kills creativity.

The frenzy with which 'art' is being introduced seems like an attempt to counter these damages. But 'schooling' not only kills creativity, it also kills authenticity, cultural diversity and aesthetic sensibility.

It will be worthwhile to look at what has been the impact of teaching art, architecture and design in this country. This could give us lessons as to what not to do in schools.

The visual experience of modern spaces all over the world is beginning to look alike- Architecture, signage, hoardings, products, colour sense. About a century ago we had diverse cultures with distinct way of life and aesthetic sensibilities that created contextually rooted architecture and artifacts. The present education has created total homogenization all over the world. Design and architectural education can be blamed as one of the most destructive agent for destroying diversity, leading to similar lifestyles. Courses taken from the experience of western cultures - Bauhaus, Ulm (first design education institution set up in Germany in the nineteen twenties) being the foundation of design education all over the world has psychologically damaged the being at all levels - aping the west, inferiority complex, cultural insensitivity and other cognitive damages.

This is true of art education also. Even today the basic inspiration is from the art movements that happened in the west. With art education becoming more formal it is also becoming very rigid and is getting preoccupied with rules, information, history etc. More illusionary is the connection art education has

with creativity and beauty as if every other subject is uncreative and devoid of beauty.

Distinct feature of all authentic cultures has been the central role of beauty, knowledge and creativity in everything it does. So the real issue then is to understand how to retain the cultural rootedness and help the learner to retain their original, authentic sense of beauty which is in true sense based on the experience of the real context in which they lead their lives.

So we may start off by asking some basic questions.

What is the purpose of beauty in life? How is it developed? Is it inborn? What is its connection with knowledge? Or how is it connected with cognition? Do senses play any role in this? What role does sense have in the present educational set up? What is authenticity? Originality? How does not being authentic impact what we do or make, etc.? What is culture and how is it formed? What is the connection between beauty, creativity and culture? How culture creates conditions for the blossoming of creativity and beauty? Do we have to teach art to develop sense of beauty in us or is beauty inherent to our being?

It was during my study at NID (National Institute of Design), India, a premier design institute that I began to explore certain fundamental questions regarding beauty, aesthetic sense, spontaneity, creativity, culture etc.

At NID, the dichotomy was that the process of learning design is completely and clearly west oriented. The courses responsible for creating design sense or aesthetic sense like elements of design, composition, various courses related to colour, form etc. are still based on Bauhaus and even today it is taught



more or less in the same manner. After a period of conflict, the three years I spent at the institute became an intense period of self-exploration. What came sharply into focus and was exemplified in the ‘education system’ at the institute was the direct relationship that existed between colonized minds, cultural and spiritual alienation and formal schooling/education. If one’s sense of beauty is conditioned and colonized then what is the meaning of culture and what is left to be called as one’s own?



Education has been the most powerful tool to condition and colonize the people as it has completely overturned the worldview of the so-called educated people of the world all over. Schooling just replaced religious superstition to scientific superstition. It turned us into believers of a different kind. It turned us from active creators and inventors of knowledge to passive believers of text and experts. We no longer use our senses and feelings and experience to know the world.

This is true of all educational institutions in this country. All aspects of our being are subjected to this false conditioning. At the level of information all we learn is about the west. At emotional level we feel inferior to the west and become imitators and our aesthetic sense is also transformed as we learn the western aesthetic sense. At the same time all true qualities of a learner are also destroyed by the schooling process. One learns to compete, lie, to cheat, to project oneself, etc. Thus a student of design, what I questioned is: how do I become a true representative of my culture. And that led to asking what culture is? What is the connection between aesthetic sense and culture, cognition and culture?

Two people who have helped me to understand beauty are the non-literate artisans of this country and children.

I have been living with rural and tribal communities for the last twenty odd years now. I did not go to them with intentions of ‘developing’ them or educating them. I went to them to recover my own

cultural roots which I had lost in the process of getting educated. I went to learn from them. For having escaped ‘education’ and ‘development’ they are still original and authentic and are holding on to the culture and world view which sustained them for centuries.

This unique stand point gives me a different picture of the rural tribal communities as being wise and evolved and it is only by learning from them that we can learn to lead a sustainable life. Of course, understanding the traditional knowledge has been a very difficult task for me as my framework or categories for understanding itself are western and reason oriented. So in the process of de-colonizing and recovering my authenticity I have been able to get glimpses of the process of knowing or being among the non-literates (sense literates).

The most important lesson has been that beauty, cognition and value are innate and are rooted in our biological make up and in the process of being in the world under right conditions these qualities are awakened. There may be neither formal nor informal act of ‘teaching’ but learning is happening all the time like breathing.

I discovered this in the process of working with artisans to make new designs. I believed that all people are creative and as a designer with western sensibility



my design would only make matters worse. Hence I began to create situations for the artisans themselves to design and develop new products. Surely enough I saw very original and beautiful creations in what they made. This made me look deeper into the learning process within the artisan communities.

What I saw there was diametrically opposite to what we the so called educated and civilized do.

Children learn their craft not as a result of teaching or formal, organized learning but by playing and re-enacting what adults do spontaneously. I found them very good observers with good imagination, creativity, determination and dexterity. The use of sense is the primary tools for learning and unlike us words are seldom used. Doing and experiencing is the basis for learning. There is total freedom and hence the internal autonomy and self-initiative of the child is at work in almost everything it does.

The basic difference between modern ‘knowledge’ system and non-literate ‘knowing’ is that we are learning world through words, reasoning, under an expert now masked as ‘guide’ and as noun and they are learning the world through sense, intuition, unguided or self-initiated and as verb.

Modern education seems to have reversed all the natural process and rewired the cognitive framework to comprehend the world. Reasoning which is the end product of knowing in natural processes is used for processing and understanding in modern knowledge process. Insight and intuition has no role.

Sensing Nature; Knowing Nature is a workshop we have been conducting at Aruvacode, Nilambur during the summer holidays – April and May with the children from the potter’s colony on realizing the importance of senses and autonomy. My role was that of a peon who would just provide minimum facility and initiate them to see things that they normally do

not see, not by instructing but by doing myself.

The fundamental issues we raise through this event are the ‘nature of learning, biologically embedded aesthetic sense in children, role of the ‘teacher’ etc.

It looks like that we are already born with aesthetic sense.

The workshop on sensing nature is for providing space to come together to listen, to see, to taste, to touch, feel, to make etc. There is no teaching.

But art education is also becoming top down and information oriented where children have to remember the details of so called masters etc. Once I came across a school where children were being asked to copy paintings of Van Gogh. In fact the trend in art education in UK is along this line. Tests are conducted to see whether children are able to identify works of Monet, Paul Klee etc. Art is being turned into history.

Art is the only activity within the school curriculum that has the potential for subverting the harm done by other subjects.

School is a strange place where children are being prepared for a distant ‘future’ by teaching them things that happened in the ‘past’. (They are turned into historians of a different sort or storage bins of information with different names - science, English, social, math etc.).

To learn/to make sense of the world children need to





Works done by non-literate potter woman Lakshmi

engage with what is happening/the concrete event or phenomenon.

To my mind 'art' education has the potential for making children authentic and original learners/creators if that is treated as awakening the sense and to connect to the context of the learner's lives?

Every generation needs to relive, relearn, recreate and reinvent certain aspects of its cultural sensibilities by engaging with the reality around them. Contextually rooted aesthetic sense is what once created the diverse cultures around the globe.

Senses which is our doors to the outer world and also to the inner world is what needs to be addressed and that too in a manner that would enhance the inherent, natural, biological tendency in all human beings.

Sensitivity in a way, is a matter of awakening the senses and feelings.

Development or awakening of aesthetic sense and creativity is not only the basis for all art forms but also the central feature of all our activities.

Rather than teaching skills to sing, paint, draw, this awakening would make a qualitative and an attitudinal change. Mere teaching of skill would only help the learner to focus on the outer form and often they are left without any content. Authentic seeing helps

one to focus on the content.

So real task is to see how to address beauty and creativity to everything we do - be it mathematics, physics or history.

And the greater challenge is how do provide the environment that would allow the natural in us to come forth.

This would require sensitivity, trust and indeed careful planning for the unplanned to happen.





Collage from coloured paper



Art by Children



Geometrical pattern with mud, ash, etc

Bibliography

The main write up is from my personal experience of living with the rural tribal communities and from the documentation and research done to understand how children as well as non-literate artisans learn. Many philosophers, thinkers, scientists and teachers have helped me to understand these issues.

Among them the prominent are as follows:

Ivan Illich, Dr. Humberto Maturana (the Chilean School of Biology of Cognition),

Semir Zeki , professor of Neuroesthetics at University College London.

Ellen Dissanayake, Affiliate Professor, School of Music, University of Washington

Vilayanur Ramachandran Director of the Center for Brain and Cognition, Professor in the Psychology Department and Neurosciences Program at the University of California, San Diego, and Adjunct Professor of Biology at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies.

JINAN has lived and worked with non-literate artisans for about 20 years, to study the biological foundations of cognition, creativity, beauty and various damages of modern schooling. He is currently involved in developing a school, based on these understandings (www.reimaginationschools.wordpress.com) and also conducting workshops with teachers and parents about learning from children (www.awakeningaestheticawareness.blogspot.com). He has a degree in Mechanical engineering from MACT, Bhopal and done his Post-graduation in Design from NID, Ahmedabad. He can be contacted at jinankb@gmail.com



Vijay Padaki

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest artist this land has produced, was also a man of deep rational thought and a clear scientific temper. That Albert Einstein, often regarded as the “scientist of the century”, engaged in a discourse with Tagore and unhesitatingly admitted that he came away enlightened says something about the poet’s perspective to art and science. Many have thought of Tagore as the da Vinci of the sub-continent, another great mind that made no distinction between art and science and, indeed, constantly playfully explored the interface in all his pursuits. It was the most unhelpful great divide that mankind had ever invented for itself.

Two questions present themselves every time we confront the great divide:

- How did the divide come about?
- What can we do about it?

Education curricula and the accompanying pedagogy are, after all, man-made devices. Therefore, they are likely to be products of their time. Take the case of English literature as a curriculum subject in India. It is now known that the teaching of English literature in schools and colleges outside Britain was a creation of the colonisation process. It was not originally a curriculum “subject” to be taught like science, geography or mathematics. An excerpt from a play might be appropriate here. The conversation is between Jeet Mukherji, an Indian engineer in his ‘sixties, and Miss Alice Taylor, his teacher in a school in British India. He is ever grateful to her for the education he received in a British educational system. She, on the other hand, feels guilty of having corrupted young Indian minds

It has been my privilege to be associated with an international programme in the area of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The programme works in sev-

ALICE : You can forgive and forget the wars and the massacres and the looting of the land. All of these will be made up. But you can never forgive the permanent damage done to the mind. It is not buried with you when you die. It is passed on. It will stick for generations.

JEET : You gave us science and technology. You gave us a language to speak to the world, and Shakespeare, and –

ALICE : That velvet-tongued opportunist? ! What do you say in Urdu for that? Matlabi, I think.

JEET : William Shakespeare, matlabi!

ALICE : The philanderer who oiled his way into the London aristocracy and charmed them with his verbosity to finance his pet projects, his adolescent fantasies.

JEET : The loquacious charm translated into a hundred languages around the world!

ALICE : Think about it, Jeet, would the name Shakespeare mean anything, anywhere, if it was not for the Empire?

JEET : It is great literature nevertheless.

ALICE : Because we taught you to believe that – that it is great. Did you know, Jeet, that English literature was never a subject for schooling before the Empire? Physics and mathematics and

geography, yes, they were subjects that could be taught. And studied. Literature was something you simply did. and enjoyed. You didn't teach it or study it. It was entirely in the interests of the Empire that English literature was brought in as a course of study.

JEET : Was it his fault that he stood out in history as a great writer?

ALICE : Is it their fault that hundreds like him, in every land, every bit the same in creative energy, never got to be known by the rest of the world?

(From: Gold and Silver. Bangalore Little Theatre, 1997. Written as part of an exchange project between Bangalore Little Theatre and the Royal National Theatre in London.)

eral countries in Latin America, Africa and South Asia, documenting the empirical knowledge base of indigenous peoples in such fields as sustainable agriculture, community health, medical practice, building technologies, nutrition, water management, and so on. The “science” underlying the practices is often profound, although the communities themselves do not call it science. It might as well be the art of soil conservation or the art of herbal preparation. Indeed the concept of science as we know it does not exist in many communities. There is only one unifying consciousness of being one with nature.

Is it possible that the concepts of Art and Science operate at the super-ordinate level of a paradigm in our cognitive organisation? In other words, a belief system that determines what other belief systems we may hold? Consider the following two contrasting paradigms in history:

- The Ptolemaic model of a geocentric universe
- The Copernican model of a heliocentric universe

The first model, operating as a paradigm, determined what was good science and what was bad science. So did the second when it succeeded in replacing the first.

In the like manner it is possible that we have two widely contrasting paradigms to explain the difference between the science-technology world view of “civilised” peoples and the art-science worldview of “indigenous” peoples:

- The earth belongs to man
- Man belongs to the earth

It can be argued that from the point of view of a child’s purposeful cognitive development, the arts-science divide is not only unhelpful, but actually harmful. As Tagore believed, it is a man-made distinction and a problem of grown-ups. It should not be inflicted upon the child. In the early stages of concept formation, exploring the amazing array of stimuli and experiences all around oneself, the formation of “knowledge” and the estimation of “truth” benefit greatly from a diversity of perspectives. This appreciation of phenomena in the world in which one exists makes no distinction between art and science.

Embracing diversity of experience in this manner includes synaesthetic (cross-sense) experiences – for instance, seeing a sound, or hearing music when looking at a picture. Indeed, this can set the healthy learning habit of seeking multiple perspectives in later life. Pigeon hole categorisation of sense data actually retard the enrichment of appreciation. The distinction between the academic disciplines (and the needed rigour in pursuit) may make sense in later years, but in the early years in primary schooling they appear quite unwarranted.

This line of reasoning leads us to the practical question of what we may actually do to promote an inclusive approach to knowledge formation in early years. In Tagore’s scheme of things it was laughably simple: promote imagination. Tagore’s work for and



with young persons combined a child-like innocence in making up stories with a profundity of content. Never one to talk down to children, his idea of storytelling accepted that the child was capable of a far greater level of imagination (and comprehension) than the grown-ups around cared to recognise. It was a principal intuitively grasped by Tagore, later amply reinforced by cognitive science and child development studies. The capacity for imagination is seen as an end in itself, good in itself, as super-ordinate to the second order capacities for arts and science. The mantra of imagination appears again and again in a lot of Tagore's writing, including his autobiographical musings. For instance:

“ ... I found endless joy in nature's charms whenever I had the chance. Too much material possession makes the mind dull and lethargic. We forget that our delight comes from what is inside, not what is out there. That really is the first lesson in growing up. A child's possessions may be few and seemingly trivial, but they need nothing more for that delight from inside. When we load a child with toys, we make them wretched and spoil their sense of play.”

We can easily see the arts as one form of imaginative activity. Science, too, must be accepted as imagi-

native activity, in getting us to grasp abstract phenomena one does not necessarily see in conventional terms. The more imagination the child is capable of the more fertile the soil for knowledge formation. It is in actually nurturing the capacity for imagination that contemporary pedagogical methods in the arts can be of great value – largely facilitative in nature, rarely didactic.

Theatre activity in the school curriculum is known to be particularly effective in developing multiple intelligences and bridging left and right brain development because of its high reliance on experiential methodology. Out of this understanding of the value of Theatre Studies in schools comes the more specialised discipline of Theatre-in-Education, a specialisation in pedagogy (TIE).

Contrary to popular belief, TIE is not mere “enactment” of scenes supposedly depicting the “message” of the lesson being studied. Enactment offers a small fraction of the potential value of TIE. It does not utilise the available power of experiential methodology. Further, the novelty of such enactment wears off quickly, and it cannot be sustained. The field is poorly developed in India, mainly because the larger theatre institution is inadequately developed.



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A Teacher's Musings

MY government school is situated about sixty km from Uttarkashi, about 2-3 km off the main road. There is a steep climb and it is in the middle of some villages, surrounded by beautiful mountains on which cattle graze.

I was appointed as Arts teacher last October and am in charge of arts and culture. I have always had a close connection with theatre and this interest enabled me to reach out to the children I teach. Despite this area not having basic facilities, there are mobile towers on every mountain. Whether the children possessed art materials or not, every one of them had a mobile phone. So last year, I spent all my energies getting art materials together for my classes.

Sitting under the winter sun, the children and I met to discuss matters. We broke away from convention and the usual classroom atmosphere and the interactions became very pleasant. There were about 350 children from classes 6 to 12 and sometimes I would be teaching more than one class at a time. We did not even feel the passing of time – the children were so absorbed in their work that they worked through their lunch break.

Up to this time the children had considered Art as just another subject like Maths, mechanically drawing stones or fruit or flowers. I tried to make it different and interesting by moving away from the set syllabus. We drew varied flora and fauna, particularly leaves. The children themselves collected 40-50 types of leaves and, to tell the truth, it was the first time I had seen such shades of green and the delicate tracery on the leaves.

I also taught them about primary colours and the combinations of red and yellow which created orange, red and green which made black, or red and blue resulting in purple..

I remember when the children had not got their art material for a long time last year, I supplied them with pencils and water colours. Although no payment was made, I am satisfied that they were used. A great attitudinal change took place.

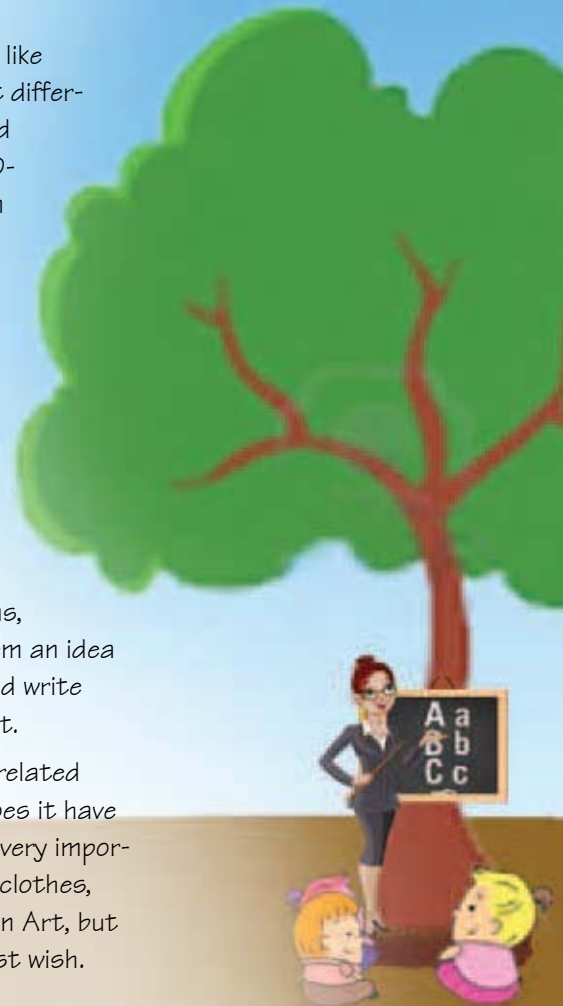
Ninety per cent of the children could not even draw mountains properly. Sitting as they were in the lap of so much beauty: the glorious mountains, with deodhar trees in the distance and other greenery had not given them an idea of true beauty. The children only wanted to complete the set syllabus and write tests. No one bothered with what they had actually understood or learnt.

My objective has been to keep the course in mind but teach them other related things, answers to questions such as What is Art? What significance does it have in our lives? My endeavour has been to change their perspectives. Art is very important for an individual's development and is clearly visible in our lives, our clothes, our homes. My aim is to inspire some of the children to take up careers in Art, but whatever they do, they should have an artistic outlook. This is my earnest wish.



Suraksha Rawat

Art teacher, Government
Inter-college, Srikalkhal, Uttarkashi





Dr. Mirella Forsberg Ahlcrona

Puppets as educational tool serve as animated symbols of thoughts, feelings and experiences. Research interests are directed towards the puppet's meaning and significance by the activity's subjective product in the human activity. By illuminating the puppet's communicative properties, the aim of my research is to develop knowledge about the puppet's relational, linguistic and action-related potential as a mediating tool in preschool and school education.

What is a puppet?

The word puppet comes from the Latin 'pupa', which among other things, means a small creature. It is also the way a spectator often perceives a puppet, which moves, speaks and in its performance, mediates actions and content. When a puppet expresses thoughts and feelings as being an individual, it is easy to perceive it as a "real" person, a subject with whom we can communicate.

The idea that an object can become alive has always fascinated people and challenged their imagination. A puppet (a glove, a string or a rod puppet) is a material artefact in which specific movements are incorporated, but not the activities or the purpose relating to the use of the puppet. By means of visual impression through external properties, such as appearance, movement and speech, the puppet's actions can evoke and arouse the spectators' emotions, thoughts and associations.



With our help, a puppet can begin to live and do the unthinkable – to act, and to give the illusion of life. It is first, in the relationship with a person, that the puppet's communicative potential can emerge and it is through communication that the puppet's existence can be acknowledged and developed. Viewed from a historical perspective, the puppet's communicative properties have been utilised for different purposes and in different areas, such as the theatre, education, therapy and politics.

While a puppet's body and construction is, in general, governed by technical rules, the content and aim for the use of puppets in education is governed by the didactic questions: what, how, why and for whom. This means that a single puppet can be used for different purposes and in different educational contexts.

A puppet's ability to link the "real world" and possible imagined worlds means that what is happening in front of the spectator at the given moment both is and is not – a puppet is not really alive, but what it does and says at a specific moment, that is real. This over bridging between what is and what is not, but what may be, illustrates and represents the puppet's duality the acting puppet's basic characteristic and behaviour. The puppet's actions can also be understood in accordance with the double vision concept, which means that a puppet is perceived by the audience in two different ways at the same time – as an acting object and as an imaginary life.

The theoretical base of research is grounded within the sociocultural tradition. The use of tools in this tradition is regarded as an individual and a collective act in which appropriation of social and cultural practices take place in relation to other individuals, other contexts and activities. The use of the puppet in education covers acts that are both collective and individual and are dynamically related to each other. Research interest is focused on the content of communicative processes where the puppet is a mediating tool between the teacher and the children, and to uncover the puppet's communicative potential, properties and opportunities in educational context. Mediation and "the act of mediating" is the link that helps thinking and conceptions to be created and to emerge. Mediation concerns how children, in their communication with the puppet, about the puppet and because of the puppet, construct and mediate their conceptual world, develop knowledge, exchange experiences, establish relationships and create new activities (Forsberg Ahlcróna, 2012).

Teacher, the puppet's creation and mediation

From a didactic perspective, the puppet's creation as a tool is primarily intellectual as it is based on the teacher's reflection of her/his work, and the way in which certain requirements can be processed with the help of the puppet. The process of creating is about the creative activity circle - an interaction between an individual's intellectual and emotional ability, which means that both thoughts and feelings contribute to make a creative action (Vygotsky, 1971).

If a teacher can make puppets, then she/he can also both make and use a puppet as a tool based on suitable educational purposes and contents. It may be about responding to situations identified in everyday life, or about specific content that a teacher wants to develop in the work with children. It is the teacher's professional intention in using the puppet that forms the basis of the puppet's aesthetic creation and con-

tent. The creation of a puppet is emotional as it is based on the teacher's personal commitment. Both the intellectual and the emotional elements make an impact on the artistic design of the puppet. That is, the puppet's aesthetic design - choice of colours, details and materials are not random but part of the teacher's didactic strategy and mediate a certain intention or message. Then, in mutual interaction with children, other potential properties develop. In other words, the puppet as a tool, implements only a small part of the spontaneous imagination. Largely, a puppet as a mediating tool is a product of an intellectual and emotional interaction, through the construction of meaning.

Teachers' thoughts about how to influence their practice occur initially only as a condition, as a prerequisite for activity. According to Aleksei Leontyev (Cole, 2009), the need steers the subject (teacher), but that it is the object (puppet) that steers the activity processes through the driving force of objects. Situations in which teacher communicates with the puppets bring the object to life and can be described as the revitalization of things. Revitalization of things develop and strengthen a relationship between teacher and children and contribute to the development of children's inter-subjectivity in particular when children and teacher share the focus of attention and when they share intentions and emotional states. Such activities, makes their actions both external and internal, both emotive and cognitive.





Puppet as a subject and the puppet's relational potential

The puppet's emotional value as a subject manifests itself and develops primarily in children's dialogues and ways of talking about the puppet. Here, the emotional value not only refers to the existence of emotions that children express, it also includes children's negotiations concerning the meaning of the puppet as being 'for real' and what it then consists of. When Leontyev writes about "the driving force of objects", he is referring to the process whereby the object's hidden properties create the mutual interplay of the driving force of different communicative acts. Applied to the puppet, this means that the puppet's specific movements "are hidden" and only emerge when the puppet "acts" on the hand, and in mutual interaction. The puppet's relational potential emerged when the children, in relationship with the puppet, develop emotional values, and perform communicative acts based on knowledge-related and emotional motives, which overstep boundaries between actual and imagined worlds.

Mediation and the puppet's linguistic potential

One of the fundamental assumptions within the framework of a socio-cultural perspective is that language functions as a link between society and individuals, since it enables one person to participate in other people's perspectives and

experiences that are mediated. According to Lev Vygotsky (1986) language functions as a link between people and within people – between the external communication and the internal thinking.

Communication, in the form of narrating, is not just a simple presentation of events. It embraces one's own perspectives, motivations, values and contemporary and spatial orientation – aspects that Jerome Bruner (1990) calls "the landscape of consciousness". According to Bruner (1986, 2002) and Bert van Oers (2003), narrating and narratives are a way of organising experiences and can be seen as social phenomena and a basic form of communication through which people express their thoughts and emotions.

The puppet's linguistic potential emerged when the children, in communicating with the puppet, mediated cultural and social experiences, expressed their conceptions of knowledge and learning, and developed indicative, semiotic and rhetorical functions of language. Most commonly the children's non-verbal and verbal activities with the puppet presented mostly current issues of today, but by overstepping the limits of the possible and imagined worlds, puppets also generate visions of a potential future.

Three-party relationships and the puppet's action-related potential

Three-party relationships refer to those that are developed in the communication between the teacher, the puppet and children – these are a way of participating, creating and developing common knowledge in social learning activities. The communication is based on a common object, the puppet, and the puppet's actions within the contexts. The three-party relationship concerns the objectivity and subjectivity process of the object through the creation of meaning in the educational process. Vygotsky (1986) regards the educational process as a participatory process and interaction in which the exchange between spontaneous and scientific conceptual thinking is developed





in mutual assistance and interplay between the parties involved.

The puppet’s action-related potential emerged through the development of those three-party relationships, which can also be described in terms of “the zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). The puppet’s action-related potential emerged

in children’s play and through collective and creative actions. Children’s performances and games with the puppets conveyed the children’s attempt to make sense of situations, where imagination and narrative played important roles.

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**12**

Traditional Performing Arts in Education

V.R. Devika

The deliverance of knowledge from servitude to will, this forgetting of the individual self and its material interest, this elevation of mind to the will less contemplation of truth, is the function of art.ⁱ

- Will Durant: The Story of Philosophy: Washington Square Press: 1961 p. 336

I always begin my class with a story. One can make a story out of anything depending upon the age of the class. A tiny one about a little spider in the window sill on the way to the class who asked me what I was going to do in the class brings in a lot of answers. There is always a story.

Story, says ancient Indian dramaturgy, was created as a way of instruction. One among the 64 arts to be mastered, storytelling creates the mood for the message. Natyashastra too begins with a story. When the world was steeped in greed and misery, the wise ones went to Brahma and asked him to create something that would bring the essence of all learning to all levels of people. Brahma meditated for awhile and created Natyaveda or the Panchama veda and gave the creative arts to mankind. He literally created visual aids to learning.

Activity: Can we list the arts?

The arts, says Brahma, in the Natyashastra, were made to “to create wisdom in the ignorant, learning in scholars, affording sport to kings and endurance to the sorrow-stricken, replete with diverse moods, informed with the varying passions of the soul, linked to the deeds of all mankind, the best, the average and the low, affording excellent counsel, pastime and all else”. This could be one of the definitions for education. Education as understood by many in its broadest, general sense is the means through which the aims and habits of a group of people lives on

from one generation to the other, generally occurring through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. In its narrow, technical sense, education is the formal process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge from one generation to another through instruction in schools. It was exactly for this purpose that the arts were created.

I argue that a teacher is an actor too. Just like an actor, the teacher is bringing the text prescribed alive through teaching in the classroom and needs to use aids like charts and activities to bring home the point. (take the message across.)

To take the message across, a teacher needs to learn different modes of communication. Traditional performing arts use four modes of communication (Abhinaya) to carry the message to the audience.

1. Angika Abhinaya is the abhinaya expressed through the limbs. A teacher needs to look at how the body is being used in expressing an idea. Do we stand erect, do we use our hands to reinforce an idea? Do we show our children that we are hands on teachers through our postures and our movements in the classroom?
Activity: Can an idea be expressed non verbally? Small groups can discuss this. Take one point from a lesson done and express it non verbally as a group.

2. Aharya abhinaya is related to the costumes and make-up of the actor in his various roles. This is depicted through the costumes and other decorations of the body. I would look at this as external aids that we bring into the classroom to illustrate an idea. **Activity:** How would you express an idea through the visual medium of drawing or using a property? Small group activity
3. Vachika abhinaya is the use of language, regulation of the tone of voice, accent and rhythm which can bring out the lyrical qualities of the play. Most teachers know they need the voice. Do we learn to speak clearly without swallowing words? Do we try to make our accent as easily understood as possible? Do we look at our pronunciation? **Activity:** Can we say the same sentence in different ways? Small groups can come up with ideas of stressing on different parts of the sentence, saying it with different emotions etc. Can we create a rap from the points in the lesson?
4. Satwika abhinaya or abhinaya of the mind denotes the inner understanding of the artist and the living of the mood of the moment. Do we teachers really feel the satwa or the essence of our role as teachers? Do we put that into action? Don't we need to train ourselves to look at what we are radiating as teachers? **Activity:** Mindfulness is the key to learning. Why is technological solution or scientific model preferred for any problem? Why some ideas need to be rediscovered before they are integrated with the cultural fabric. Is it not important to think about science, art and technology as expressions of desire and imagination, as well as the progressive accretion of knowledge? Imagination is more important than knowledge said Albert Einstein.

The performing arts seek understanding and enjoyment which is explained as Rasa as their goal. To try and achieve this, arts became pure communication using the body, facial expressions, music, rhythm, dialogue, storytelling and whatever else works. Rasa

(sanskrit, lit. 'taste'), a concept first introduced in the Natyasastra, the oldest existing Indian treatise on dramaturgy (200 BC–AD 200) can be translated as aesthetic appreciation, but this is a superficial definition that does not do justice to the spiritual and philosophical implications of this term. It is perceived as an experience ranging from simple enjoyment to complete absorption.

Forms of indigenous performing arts

Consider the variety of forms:

- Traditional folk theatre or rural dramatic forms, including tribal mimes and dance dramas
- Puppetry
- Oral literature cum musical forms, folk musical styles, ballads, harikatha, Kabigan, story telling etc.
- Fairs and festivals including social, ritual and ceremonial gatherings
- Folk dances
- Ritual symbols, traditional designs and miscellaneous motifs
- Sound signals and speech surrogates

The Alha of the popular ballad forms of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh has survived since ages, both in content and structure. Knowing fully the intense association of the style with the masses, several folk poets conveniently poured in new words to address people in the rural parts of the country. Even political parties and sales promotion agencies use these reciters to get across their messages. Its utilization has thus widened its impact, even across the cultural regions where it has traditionally survived. There are similar examples from other lingual areas.

The bare fact that despite the availability of modern means of communication, the traditional folk media continue to exist, makes it all the more important for educationists to test their validity.



When I viewed the classical dance and its architecture and the folk forms and their dynamism, I felt this is something we have left out of our school system but they do belong there. There is mathematical structuring in the patterns and architecture of a form like Bharathanatyam, Kathak or Odissi. They can easily be related to geometry and geography. Music too is full of mathematics.

It is essential to convey the ‘Wow!’ factor to children—the way the traditional forms are dynamic, how they solve the problems of time and space, how they constantly relate contemporary events to the epics, how elastic they are and how techniques such as using a cloth curtain in many ways are ultra-modern in their concept.

Devarattam is a non-lyrical form danced to the beat of the Devadundubhi. When I saw it in 1984, I was struck by the abstraction it had achieved and the fact of it being a non-lyrical form and a men’s dance. I was delighted to bring it to the schools for boys to be trained in. Boys feel dance is only for girls, as the only physical movement available to them at school is the dry drill. The vocal syllables of the beats of Devadundubhi serve to make a vocalization which will make pronunciation and reading easier. Rhythmic recitation gives a rhythm and grace to the body. There are abstract forms available in every nook and corner of our country. What is needed is a passionate interpretation of these for educational purposes. It is important to use local performing forms to build bridges with the local culture.



Folk theatre and some of its forms

Therukoothu is a traditional performing art form popular in the northern regions of Tamilnadu. It is a powerful form which is ballad, opera and ballet combined in one. Its origin is traced back to the sixteenth century. The content of the plays enacted in this form are mythological in nature. The treatment of the stories however is contemporary.

Therukoothu is commissioned by a village in thanksgiving for a good harvest or in prayer for rain and for temple rituals and social life cycle rituals. The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana are depicted in different stages along with rituals where the villagers who were audiences for the overnight performance become participants. Therukoothu is drama, spectacle, ritual and an essential part of the life cycle. It has high literary textual dialogues and songs and also contemporary expressions in the linking of current time to the period of the epic. There is a constant movement between periods and time in the performance of the ritual and the drama.

There are many more aspects of the Koothu like the manner in which the Koothu characters introduce themselves, the role of the Kattiakaran who links the different periods of the play and performance, drawing parallels to contemporary situations and the dramatic solutions to the problems of depicting time and space.





The first time I saw Therukoothu, I was awestruck. Innumerable ideas for classroom use came up. First of course was giving an assembly demonstration with explanations about history and context and an idea about the ambience of the village and then the use of the curtain cloth. The repeated questioning of the character who has just made the entry by the Kattiakaran gave me an idea for creating a similar dramatic moment in the classroom. I asked my students in class 7 studying cold and warm currents to take on the roles of these currents. They were made to stand behind a hand-held curtain and announce that the cold current was about to enter. The screen was removed and the current introduced itself in a

creative manner. The class asked questions—how are you formed? Where do you normally live? What are your effects? I have done this for historical characters, the subject of a poem, the right angle, a perpendicular line, etc.

The few examples I have outlined only give a flavour of the vast treasure of indigenous culture available to us. Apart from bringing new ideas and techniques into the classroom, this treasure makes possible a subtle imbibing of another way of life. It is through education, more than anything, that we can bring the young into direct contact with village life and awaken in them a respect and feeling for the traditional arts.

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Nilanjan P Choudhury

Theatre can be a powerful means of communicating the excitement and richness of science.

In an influential lecture at the University of Cambridge in 1959, the British chemist and novelist, C. P. Snow drew attention to the ever widening chasm between the sciences and the humanities in post-war Britain. He asserted that "... the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups" – literary intellectuals on one side and physical scientists on the other.

Half a century later, in a distinctly warmer part of the world i.e. India, it would appear that the situation has not changed significantly. Of course, not being an intellectual by any stretch of imagination prevents me from commenting on the "intellectual life" of Indian society but I certainly think that the polarity that Snow pointed out is alive and kicking in our schools, colleges and daily lives.

In India, the hard lines between science, humanities and arts are drawn deep and early. Formally, this occurs after the Class 10 board exams, when students necessarily have to make a choice between Science, Arts or Commerce. From this point onwards, the rigidity of the formal education system offers little space to a 16-year-old who has a passion for say, both painting and physics (assuming that such s/he is interested in anything at all, after the brutal cramming of the previous 10 years). Unlike foreign universities, where one may easily combine a major in engineering with a minor in film studies, such possibilities are remote here. Is it any wonder that we rarely encounter the likes of Steve Jobs who inte-

grated engineering and calligraphy to develop the marvellous user interface of Apple products?

An increasingly specialised world forces us down straight and narrow paths that lead to a diminished appreciation of the richness of both the sciences and the arts. Yet, when the two converge the results can be unexpected and interesting. In the last few months, I have had the opportunity to be a part such a convergence. The amateur theatre group, that I sometimes work with, staged two plays about science and scientists – Copenhagen by Michael Frayn and Life of Galileo by Bertolt Brecht.



Scene from the play 'Copenhagen' by Michael Frayn's

Both plays are based on true incidents and feature historical characters. Copenhagen is a dramatised account of a mysterious meeting between two giants of modern atomic physics – Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr. The meeting took place in Bohr's house in Copenhagen in September, 1941 at the height of

the Second World War, at a time when Denmark was under German occupation. Heisenberg was one of the few physicists who had stayed on in Hitler's Germany unlike Einstein, Wolfgang Pauli, Max Born and many others who had crossed over to the Allies. Heisenberg, a deeply patriotic German, was accused of trying to build the atom bomb for Hitler, an allegation that he refuted time and again. Bohr on the other hand, was part of the Manhattan project that actually built the Allied atomic bombs that were ultimately unleashed upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In a Rashomon like narrative structure, the play flits across time and space, interpreting and re-interpreting that fateful meeting between Bohr and Heisenberg, as multiple attempts are made to answer the crucial question – why did Heisenberg meet Bohr in Copenhagen in 1941? Each dramatic interpretation presents a different answer to the audience. Among others, the explanations include:

- 1) that Heisenberg tried to appeal to Bohr's conscience as a scientist hoping that he would be able to influence the allies to stop the Manhattan Project,
- 2) that Heisenberg tried to pick Bohr's brains to understand the physics of fission so that he could build the bomb himself and
- 3) that he came to explain how he was preventing the Nazi scientists from building the bomb and why he had to stay on in Germany.

The play operates at many levels – personal, political and scientific. It explores the personal and professional relationship between Bohr and Heisenberg, once friends and colleagues, but now pitted against each other. It brings out the very human dilemmas before the scientist, who engrossed in his research doesn't care "what the truth will lead to" but suddenly discovers that he is forced to care because of his innate humaneness.

Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* is an incredibly complex and nuanced work – a three-hour long play liberally peppered with references to abstruse concepts such as the uncertainty principle, Schrodinger's Cat, matrix mechanics, the diffusion equation and so on, which make it a bizarrely difficult and intellectually demanding experience for any audience. When the play opened we were fairly sure that people would start leaving after half an hour.

Yet much to our surprise, we had packed houses and people sat attentively (the odd yawn apart) through the play. Audience members terrified of science said that they had no idea that atomic physics could be so interesting. Yet others said that they were fascinated by how history had come alive before them. Students with advanced degrees in science remarked how they had finally understood what quantum mechanics



Scene from the play 'Life of Galileo' by Bertolt Brecht

was really about (although this must be taken with a pinch of salt).

On the other hand, Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, which describes Galileo's struggles against the Church to establish the doctrine of heliocentrism, is much more accessible. To begin with, the science bits are mostly about stellar and planetary motions – much easier on the mind than quantum mechanics. The storyline is linear, there are light moments and the themes are



epic and dramatic – the battle between science and superstition, the power of the state versus the power of ideas, the needs of the flesh versus the yearnings of the soul, love versus integrity and so on.

However, it is a very verbose and a very long play that runs for nearly three hours. Not your usual Saturday night entertainment in an age where Twitter-length attention spans abound. Once again we were queasy when the play opened and once again the audience surprised us with their numbers and continued presence. What delighted us the most was the number of children who attended and how several of them later remarked that they had enjoyed the play.

Children are the best and most honest of critics. They don't care for names. Brecht and Galileo might as well be Martians in pink suits to them. If they get bored they make it amply clear very quickly. I wondered what would make a child of eleven or twelve sit still for three hours, to watch the story of a discovery that any eight year old knows about.

The answer of course, lies in the power of storytelling. And theatre tells the story of science in a different way altogether.



Classic Stage Company's staging of Bertolt Brecht's "Life of Galileo"

In school text books, Galileo's epic struggles are reduced to a single page of dry text with perhaps a diagram or two. But Brecht, in his masterly prose, explores many different dimensions of science and

scientific thinking – the rejection of authority ("truth is the child of time, not of authority"), the hollowness of theory without experimental evidence ("would you care to observe those impossible and unnecessary stars through the telescope"), the test of repeatability when validating theory ("fifty times the man weighs his pieces of ice") and the responsibility of science towards humanity (when Galileo describes scientists as "inventive dwarves").

Theatre can be a powerful means of communicating the excitement and richness of science. But what makes it a unique medium is its ability to uncover the messy human emotions that accompany the discovery of the cold and elegant equations that explain our world – the conflicts and the choices, the disappointments and the euphoria of people whom we know of, but do not really know.

Theatre provides the possibility of bridging the divide between science and art that Snow spoke of. Can it stimulate both the right and left brains and help develop more well rounded children? Can it excite more young people into considering science as a profession as opposed to engineering, medicine or management? Can it persuade painters in taking a greater interest in the science of colours? The experience of science theatre in India is too recent and the scale too tiny, to even attempt any answers.

But to my mind, the real value of theatre to science lies elsewhere.

We live in a country where superstitions and irrational thinking abound and frequently surface in many unpleasant ways – in the form of mobs stampeding to worship milk drinking Ganeshas, Chief Ministers who feed crows to ward off evil, lovers separated by uncooperative horoscopes and children who are made to fear eclipses.

If the theatre of science can provoke people to think about the world in which they live, in a scientific and rational way, it will have played its part well.

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My Point of View

I was never the ideal student through my school days, ranked around thirty second once in a class of fifty four. Made it to cultural captain in my twelfth year and was evidently more interested in music and the arts. Got in through a college entrance exam and got my first whiff of the Fine Arts, a whiff that was to change my life forever.

And so I devoted five academic years to the arts, the first three of which really mattered. My mind was reeling with a rush of new information, I was interested in history and culture and suddenly... it all made sense. Here was a field of study so multi-disciplinary in nature that it linked everything else and made it significant. I exited my Master's programme receiving proficiency awards and a Gold Medal to my name.

There are few that have the luxury of loving their 'job' and I am one of them. I teach Visual Arts and lecture at both school and college. I particularly love teaching the International Baccalaureate program as the syllabus allows flexibility that is conducive to teaching art. I begin my class getting to know my students and slowly zone in on particular areas of art that interest them. Depending on the careers they want to pursue or their specific fields of interest, I chart out possible projects and workshops. Having a limited number of students in my class enables individualized teaching.

Through slide show presentations, videos, movies and libraries- art theory and art history are introduced. The students learn about the elements of art, basic perspective, design principles and work on several other exercises to hone their skill and sensitivity to media. They explore art history, art movements and the evolution of art across different cultural perspectives and are encouraged to draw parallels and make connections. Strong importance is placed on research and analysis in the IB where the student produces an investigation book at the end of two years summing up observations, documenting procedures and exploring new ideas.

Class demos familiarise the students with the common media and through trial and error we explore some not so con-

ventional media such as wire, packing tape, and several others that defy classification! The students are also encouraged to experiment with textiles, installations, happenings and performance art. News paper clippings, gallery tours and visits to artist communities such as Cholamandal Artist's Village help enhance a student's contemporary knowledge and keep them well informed of new and emerging media. At the end of two years they present their artworks and investigation books to an external examiner in a personal interview and are graded for the same. The results have been fairly remarkable considering the initial tentative steps.

I have had the occasional student join the course under the mistaken impression that art is 'easy'. We plod along and manage. But for those that are ready to take the plunge- they find themselves a new language, a powerful voice that is bold enough to pitch their opinions at the public and watch for reactions.

I look forward to my classes with a bunch of eager students from whom I have more to learn than teach. I take great joy in watching their faces light up when they've had their private epiphanies, walking around dazed by the gravity of an art concept they've suddenly assimilated. Some are enthusiastic to a point where I receive calls at any point of the day... or night might I add. X-ray sheets resulting from a broken bone turn into lamp shades, old watchmen's bicycles become part of an installation, thrown away bottle caps become a potent public message, art is a wonderful thing!

- Anisha Verghese

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Lakshmi Krishnamurthy

A scene from a 'life skills' workshop held at the Concerned for Working Children (CWC) centre in Kundapura, Mangalore District :

Children (10 – 15 years of age) in the workshop are from nearby villages, staying at the CWC hostel. They have been/are, attending various government schools. The children are asked to discuss in groups of five and six, what their experiences are, of caste discrimination in the classroom; after which, each of the five groups has to choose one of their real-life experiences and enact it for the whole group. Further discussion, involving all the children, follows the enactments.

It is amazing, the varying shades of discrimination that the children depict: Between teacher and children; children and children and very perceptively, the teacher's differential behaviour to parents of higher and lower castes. This last is most unexpected and a good deal of discussion follows, moving from discrimination in the classroom to the many faces of discrimination in the wider community.

What is important is that, mostly unrecognised feelings and attitudes of the participants are uncovered – these are talked about and analysed, contributing to the understanding of their own selves and also of others in the larger community, layered as it is by different caste and class strata.

Enacting a situation, makes it come alive in the here and now, so that reactions and feelings are there for all to see and experience and respond to, in the urgency of 'now'.

Children are learning about their social environment and about their own particular positions in that environment – not through text-books and lectures but from living through their own experi-

ences. As are the adults present at the workshop - teachers, parents and other guardians of the children in their care.

“We never knew they understood so much!” is the astonished reaction of the adults. They even begin to evince respect for the children, albeit guardedly!

The children are not watching a drama; they are not enacting a given situation from a text-book – both not uncommon ways of using theatre in education. When children are living through the experience of the “issue” and then talking about it, in addition to understanding the subject with their heads, they are also doing so through the prism of their emotions, their values, their prejudices, etc. - all the ‘feeling’ things. Are they not likely to remember all this much

more and much longer than if it were a lesson? Also, it contributes to a widening of the horizons of the outside world, to a deepening of their own inner worlds and to the forming of an informed and hopefully, a liberal world-view. Which, otherwise, would have been bounded by the values, opinions, etc., of members of their families and of the immediate society they live in.





There are many such issues – a few will be touched upon, later in this paper. But first to place this form of ‘theatre’ in the larger perspective of theatre as a whole.

Theatre/Drama has been around for almost as long as human beings have existed. And over this long period of time, theatre has taken many a shape, in many a situation and with a variety of purposes.

- Ancient people appear to have used the depiction of a hunting incident sometimes as rehearsal - and sometimes as celebration - of a successful hunt. In either case, there are actors and there is an audience.
- Hinduism in the East and Christianity in the West are two prominent examples of the use of theatre to promote/popularise religion: depicting the life of Christ, various incidents from the Bible; dramatizing episodes from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana – well-loved and widely-known through theatrical performances, especially in pre-literate days; later, through cinema and television. Again, this involves performers and audience.
- From the Church to the State and to civil society, from religion to politics, theater became a powerful political tool for resistance movements – from political theatre to the ‘street theatre’ of today. In India, from the stage performances of IPTA to the strong statements of Safdar Hashmi, to the watered down awareness-building performances of many a sponsored group. Whether religious or political or awareness-building in orientation, all these performances involve performers and an audience.
- And then, of course, there is the vast body of theatre for entertainment – which can be thought-provoking, laughter-inducing, innovative, surrealistic, whatever..... from Bhasa to Shakespeare to now. Entertainers and the entertained; performers and the audience.

The ‘scene’ and it’s detailing, recounted earlier, is in the order of “by the people, of the people, for the people” - in the sense that there is no distinction between author/playwright, performer and audience.



All are one.

This type of theatre, is designed to further personal growth and inculcate ‘life skills’ - the confidence and self-esteem to enable one to negotiate the many-layered world around one. In all (or most of) other types of theatre, the primary objective is not personal growth - though this often does happen, in the course of ‘getting under the skin’ of different characters.

As stated earlier, in many a classroom nowadays, ‘theatre’ is used for making lessons come alive – this is a good way of consolidating memory. But that is the boundary – it does not go much further.

There are many workshop* instances(see ‘References’) of ‘theatre’ of the sort detailed at the start of this paper. To give a few more examples: these examples are from various workshops that were conducted, in different parts of the country, over a considerable period of time.

The following is what came out of the enactments, which are on the lines of the pattern described earlier – small group discussion; then the enactment, followed by a large group discussion.



The children at these workshops are mostly between the ages of 10 to 15; from government schools; largely from rural areas, some from urban areas. Teachers and mothers, other care-givers are often present. Similar workshops have also been held with adolescent girls and adult women, with some variations in reactions to the ‘issues’ involved.



Some enactment issues/situations

The situation: Stealing

- Students felt that stealing is bad in itself, but it is much worse when other people, especially peers, get to know of it. It frightens children to think that stealing at school will be reported at home – it is not the expected beating that is most frightening, but the responsibility for the loss of family *izzat/maryada*. If stealing has happened at home, it is never made public – to safeguard the name of the family.

Getting a Prize

- This always makes a child happy, but the happiness is somewhat dimmed when parents don’t make much of it (as often happens). In the thanks speech, the child invariably mentions the teacher and parents “but for whom I would never have won this prize.” There is a down-playing of individual success – to deflect ‘nazar’ and to prevent the child from getting too much ‘ego’. But children long for praise, which is not always forthcoming – for them, praise is more important than the prize.

A married daughter returns home

- In this enactment, the children who played fathers and brothers were very vociferously for the girl going back to her in-laws. Sisters and mothers were sympathetic, but also, were for the girl going back, voicing this more mutedly than the men. The girl herself was never asked what she would have liked to do.

When asked by us, in enactment after enactment, what she would like to do, she invariably replied that she would go back – she saw her identity as being tied in with the in-laws – “I am nothing at my mother’s place”.

Parents fighting

- Parents fighting disturbs children deeply – though they (specifically the boys) greatly enjoy enacting the fighting. Some of the groups change the reference – do not enact parents fighting – is it too threatening? Do they not want to expose delicate family matters? I don’t know. We do not pursue the subject. In practical, non-emotional terms, children say fighting disturbs their studies.

At a couple of workshops where there were no enactments, when participants were asked about their reactions to these and other situations, answers were uni-dimensional; never so rounded, earnest and in-depth as the answers that follow enactments and discussion thereof.

The ‘essence’ of all the enactments and discussions is pertinent to any strategies that might be visualised/evolved for future empowerment and growth of children – whether it be in the learning environment of school or in interactions with adults in the wider world. It is good to be able to understand where the child is coming from, so as to render any interaction with him/her, more meaningful.

- Preserving the **izzat/maryada** (honour) of the family is of primary importance, not only to all adults, but to the children as well. An example of

this is the unanimous verdict that a married girl's place is at her in-laws, no matter what.

- Following from this **'What will people say'** plays an important part in shaping attitude and behaviour.
- **Outward appearances** have to be maintained – as in the case of showing respect to elders. Some elders' qualities may not be 'good', but respect has to be shown – it is for the 'position', not so much for the 'person'.
- **Peer image** is next in importance. Co-students and friends laughing at one's downfall (being scolded, beaten and specially, being made to feel small) is very hard to bear and takes a long time to overcome. It would not be so bad if scolding, etc. were done when alone with teacher or parent – 'why must I be made to feel small always in front of others?' An important point for adults to note.
- **'Duty' rather than 'rights' orientation.** An example - during introductions, when asked to name one quality that they liked in themselves, invariably answers were – helping others, social-service minded, adjustable and more of the same. Also, following from this, praise is muted for any

success achieved – the child is cut down to size, so that he/she doesn't get too much 'ego'.

- **Adults and children alike see themselves as part of the family, the caste, the community, rather than as individuals.** First allegiance goes to the larger unit and promotion of the self is subservient to promotion of the family/larger unit. Adults and children are **'roles', not individuals.** This is a very important point to note – as in this competitive world of individual success, it becomes imperative to balance individual development with family values – how can this be done without too much mental and emotional anguish?

In conclusion, it bears repetition that adults - teachers, mothers and other care-givers were astounded at the maturity of analysis and the depth of understanding of these children. A sneaking feeling that children are human beings after all? And grudgingly stated, deserving of **'respect'**. Usually 'respect' flows from the younger to the older – it is all but revolutionary to think of 'respect' flowing from the elder to the child!

And indeed, isn't 'respect' of the essence, for a satisfactory and fulfilling interaction between any two human beings?





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**15**

The Oscillating Note in the Age of the Great Dumbing Down –

Film Appreciation in the context of Art Education in schools today

V. Prasad

Cinema as a club activity and a learning tool in the classroom space.

“To try is art. To find is aesthetics”

While J. Krishnamurti, the noted philosopher, says ‘Art is putting things in their right place’, Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish master of minimalist cinema, on being asked if he thought art was useful to human beings, said bluntly - ‘It has to be, it has to be, otherwise we might as well go to hell!’

Cut to the present day.

Late one evening, amidst all the inanity called the IPL cricket, asked by Harsha Bhogle on TV if he were to bowl in the IPL today with its quick fire or rapid fire format, would he still flight the ball to the kind of batsmen that he would be bowling to, spin wizard E.A.S. Prasanna retorted that it never mattered to him and never did as to who he was bowling to; all that mattered to him was whether he could deceive the batsman in flight, whoever he was. So long as he could do so, he would flight the ball!

Spin bowling to him was not about merely flighting the ball or tossing the ball up as much as the constant attempt to deceive the batsman. To Prasanna, spin bowling was all about deception and flight. The aesthetics of his art of bowling – flight and deception!

And what did he think about the state of off spinners in the country today? asked Harsha. The great sage of spin bowling replied: ‘Spin bowling is all about self-belief and confidence without which a spinner cannot grow and become a master of his craft. The present day spinners lacked self-belief without which deception in flight is not possible’.

But what has spin bowling to do with educating art in schools?

I think the corner stone of education in school is whether at the end of it, a child can leave with a sense of self-belief, esteem – confidence being an outcome of this – to face life. An encounter with art provides a window. And in art perhaps, children can be sensitised to the aesthetics of form and content as a process of exploration.

We live in times when children have access to excessive and varied information flow of all sorts and much of it is being ‘dumbed down’ – made easy to digest – to facilitate ease of access. In the process, what is often sacrificed is the challenge to the child’s ability to imagine, read between the lines and to realise that stories, narratives do not necessarily have to end with clear denouements. Also, the quantity and the quality of the information flow is such that the child’s mind is engaged in choosing and processing the information thus leaving little scope for examining, weighing the nature of the information critically and analyse as this takes time and that is a luxury one can ill afford in today’s context. We live in an age where time is a factor that imprisons and controls rather than liberate and, therefore, one has to come to the point quickly and say it crisply!

So, in an age of rapid and easy paced growth of information, whose primary function seems to be to make things easy to decipher and ready to be processed,



‘dumbing down’ that is, it is relevant to ask: Why is it important to sensitise children to art and its appreciation in schools? Educating children to come into contact with art offers an opportunity to address the nature of it, its qualities which perhaps are the very opposite of the common denomination: observation, sharing in depth, reflective, quietude, silence, taking time over something.

It is in this context that offering film appreciation in schools becomes relevant and important. Cinema, the youngest of all art forms, which is a sort of synthesis of all other art forms that have preceded it – music, dance, painting, drama – is unfortunately stuck with a millstone round its neck, that of providing entertainment. Films must move and entertain, or are expected to, at least. This pervasive demand on the nature of cinema is such that it contributes significantly to the ‘dumbing down’ effect referred to earlier that perhaps deadens young minds that are ripe for sowing and on the cusp of blooming. Education seems a continuous process of reflection and search for the right seeds to be sown in the young minds. Art education is perhaps one such attempt at school and a film appreciation club is an outcome of such an exploration. It offers a window of opportunity that challenges this paradigm – ‘dumbing down’ – that is, by providing children with an opening whereby, they get a taste and a chance to encounter art by watching world cinema. It is an occasion for children to see the works of artists who have dared to differently use the medium of film. They become familiar with the works of artists who tell stories with imagination, using the medium of cinema for purposes other than only entertainment and business propositions; artists who have pushed the frontiers of the medium. What does this process of familiarization with different styles and from different cultures do to children’s minds then?

The renowned Indian film maker, Satyajit Ray, has said that ‘If film is an art form, then aesthetics ought

to emerge from it’. Is it possible through film appreciation to educate children on art by exposing them to a kind of cinema other than the mainstream entertainment that is constantly available to them – to sensitise them to the aesthetic that is present in the films they get to see in the film appreciation club; films that they would otherwise never get to see, perhaps? Aesthetic may be described as a set of principles that make something beautiful, which enhances the enjoyment, the nuances that go into making something unique thus offering a chance for children to learn and appreciate. For instance in Satyajit Ray’s *Aparajito*, the boy Apu’s growth from childhood to becoming a young adult is underscored by – the depiction of Benares that fills the boy’s world, his relationship with his widowed mother that is marked by an initial bonding to the widening chasm that separates them finally, his desire to go to school and later to leave his village, his final hours with his dying father marked by care and affection amidst the sound and fury of the festival of lights and his encounter with death as a young lad – all these are themes that are universal but, it is the way that Ray depicts these themes that is striking as the hallmark of an artistic quality.

A film appreciation club at school in the context of art education thus provides children a chance to cultivate an aesthetic sensibility and an alternative to mainstream culture. Art implies form and content, where ‘form’ would mean, how an artist in this case



A scene from Satyajit Ray’s ‘Aparijito’



the film director, uses the tools available at hand like sound, music, editing, cinematography etc. in cinema while telling the story; and ‘content’ would imply the quality of the narrative itself – the way it unfolds and develops, the characterisation that include the nuances of the unfolding theme, drama and emotion. The process, by which this familiarization happens over several screenings of different films as it gradually develops and unfolds in children, is the discussions that follow film screenings on form, content and genre. Slowly, as children are exposed to films from the world over and understanding seeps in over time, one could say that this extends their aesthetic horizons, enabling them to cultivate a taste for the finer aspect of the art form they get to see.

While in the classroom, watching films or specific scenes/sequences helps children imbibe the necessary skills of analysis leading to their understanding of the finer aspects of cinema – identifying and understanding the central idea or theme; the use of sound, music, language, on-screen and off-screen effects that convey the idea and the specific ways different artists use them that lends to their individual styles. These skills – analytical and critical thinking - are required and come into play in the classrooms and are vital not only in the understanding of their texts but also the quality of writing that follows. The

discussions that follow the film screenings enhance the children’s critical thinking skills in observing and identifying such aesthetic attributes. For instance, the theme of desperation and struggle in Vittorio De Sica’s *Bicycle Thief* takes place amidst the post-world war gloom in Italy. The increasing despair of the father in search of his stolen bicycle that he so badly needs for his job and in the process his humiliation in the end, unfolds in front of his young son. The boy’s increasing impatience and anger at his father’s methods to recover his bicycle is contrasted by the desperate situation the father is in demanding desperate measures. The discussions that follow after a film help children to get to know the nuances and subtleties of artistic expressions thus enabling them to enlarge their sensibilities in the field of art. The in depth sharing and observation that happens after the film screenings during discussions brings about a sense of self-belief and helps build their confidence through the mutual sharing that takes place. Children become aware that other cultures across the world with their differences can also be right. The films from world cinema they get to see provoke children to categorise, infer and think on matters that have native as well as global significance - an experience that ultimately helps them to be reflective, which perhaps is a natural corollary of art education.



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16 Going Deeper Than Words...

Chandini Harlalka

Art can provide kids with an easier way to express themselves since children are more naturally artistic and creative.

Rohan (12 years) was at it again that morning.

He hates external noises. Another child was crying and this had set him off (an over stimulated environment). Screaming and throwing his school bag he was looking for more things to fling... Teary-eyed he looked up at me ...in despair. I slowly led him away to the art room and handed him a large sheet of paper and some crayons. He was excited to see the blank sheet and a whole box of crayons. He gave up crying, sat down immediately and took out a crayon, and started to draw....

He was full of concentration, smiling to himself and totally immersed in his creation. And in just five minutes he had drawn, coloured and finished his work. It was an airplane on a runway... Thai Airways, cockpit and aerodrome in the background. A perfect picture had emerged from his artistic hands. He said he liked to be in the cockpit it was quiet there.

This whole exercise for him was a release of his frustration; his intolerance to external noise was expressed in a complex drawing of a cockpit. With pride we put the work up on the school notice board. His face lit up and he walked away with a big smile on his face and a waltz in his walk. This is what ART can do to these differently abled children.

Rohan, an autistic child, has many issues and throws tantrums daily. But art somehow calms him down, eases his mood and makes him cope with every day. Art can be not only a coping mechanism but also therapeutic. Art for him is not a hobby but an extension of his thoughts. Art can provide kids with an easier way to express themselves since children are more naturally artistic and creative. Not every child may be as creative as Rohan, not every picture is going to be as perfect... but that's the larger goal of art. It should not be result oriented. The spot light here is not the drawing but it is the process that heals.

Why do we not see this more often in our schools? One reason could be because art in most schools is taught once a week; and during that time, the kids are forced to draw an apple or a coconut tree with mountains in the background - such pre-determined creations which are so standardised that it does not even portray the creativity of the 'art instructor'! Art needs to be part of an everyday process of learning. Children with special needs thrive on routine, so a regular interception of art in the curriculum would be greatly helpful.

Most children with special needs have innate visual powers. A question and answer type of format can be daunting and intimidating for a child, especially when



they have to try and explain themselves with their already limited vocabulary. Because of this, art for children can be a much more viable solution for communication than simply having a conversation and talking about things.

How can we create such an enriching art based environment for children with special needs? Here are six simple steps that anyone can take to bring art into the life of ‘special children’ in a meaningful manner. These have worked for me as an art consultant and I don’t think why it should not work for anyone – be it a regular teacher in an inclusive classroom, a parent of an autistic child or a volunteer in a special school.

- **Familiar Space:** Children are often comfortable with people who are familiar to them – faces they recognise – and through time they realise that these people pose no threat. It is important to be around for them to see and silently watch the kids. Each of these children’s needs are different and by watching them we understand that art for each of them has a different meaning.
- **Right materials:** It is important to keep in mind the developmental phase of the child when choosing materials. One already knows that the child’s physical limitations do not always correspond to his/her developmental level. For example, if a school-age child has difficulty manually grasping objects, offer him or her more sophisticated art materials that you would give a younger child; e.g., large oil pastels are as easy to grasp as big crayons but tend to look and feel more mature.
- **Be objective:** When children share their imagery with us, they are showing that they trust us enough to let us into their inner world. We can help them add verbal language to describe their internal experience by reflecting what we see in non-

judgmental terms: “I see you drew a green tree. I see a little girl who seems sad.” By being objective, we’re allowing the child to feel comfortable about sharing. Children with autism who engage in one-on-one sessions show an improved ability to imagine and think symbolically, enhanced ability to recognise and respond to facial expressions, new ability to manage sensory issues such as a range of texture and greater fine motor skills.

- **Create a dialogue:** The approach should not be one wherein too many questions about the work is asked. But allowing time for them to answer and building the conversation on those ‘nuggets’ is what has succeeded for me.
- Having patience and being supportive of the process is as important as any other. Of course it is easier said than done, but for art to work it does take time and effort.
- **Have fun:** Art making with a child can be a wonderful way to strengthen the relationship. Don’t put too much emphasis on the final product, the ‘mantra’ is to relax and have fun. The creative process itself will empower children to safely explore their limits and reach their full potential. Art fosters pride in themselves and their creations.

Self expression through art-making is a powerful yet safe way of allowing children to express their feelings in relation to their limited ability. Although in certain situations it is wise to seek out a trained art therapy professional, as individuals working or engaging with special children, one can incorporate some of the same tools professionals use.

Children may never develop a sense of aesthetics for their work, but what we need to recognise is the honesty of approach, the power of being able to express feelings and emotions through art. This



is in itself ground breaking, especially for children such as Rohan for whom we have failed in creating a 'normal' environment. Lets' not think of art for artists and art as an elitist hobby.... for special children art is a language to communicate, art is a medium of expression. Lets' go deeper than words!!

Like Elbert Hubbard said "Art is not a thing; it is a way".



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**17**

Child's Play –

Set and prop design as a collaborative and creative process in schools

Kalpana Balaji

It is said that for theatre to work and to convey a story to its audience, the first thing you need is the wilful suspension of disbelief. Everyone watching knows that the story unfolding in front of their eyes isn't real. Everybody knows that they are in a large hall somewhere and the stage is filled with "actors". Yet, once the play begins, as an audience you suspend your disbelief. You buy in to the story and the setting, and if it is skilfully told you are transported completely into another world.

In order to tell a story skilfully, all the key ingredients of a theatre production must be put together well. The storyline, the treatment, the acting, the use of stage, the sets, props, lights costume and music. Each component would have to be thought out and planned with the same care. In professional productions, a Director would usually work with a team of others in charge of each component starting from early stages of rehearsal so that there is time and space for different creative inputs to come in and for ideas to bounce off each other.

Over the past six years, I have had the good fortune to work within a close-knit professional theatre group and have been a part of several such productions where the strength of the finished product really came out of collaborative brainstorming over several months. Yet, when I look back at my memories of involvement with theatre in college, and in school, the opportunity for idea exchange, and even the feeling of creating something together is a lot less in college and not there at all in school.

As children in a school play we were told what to do, what to wear and what to say. There was no question of exploring, and certainly no possibility of voicing your opinion on set or costume let alone what the play was about. This is somewhat understandable when there are thirty to forty children put under the charge of two teachers and when the time available is minimal. If the school education system places no priority and gives little or no time for theatre and the arts on a regular year-round basis, then this situation is not surprising, but it is unfortunate. Theatre is a special art form that encompasses all manner of performance arts. Music, dance, acting, body work and a lot of behind-the-scenes creativity as well. For this reason, it is a great space for collaboration and team building among children.

I firmly believe that no one is born a geek or an artist or a bookworm. It is exposure and means that start to shape our interests and make us what we are. Very young children find it a lot easier than adults to switch from reality to a make believe world. They do it constantly by imagining themselves in fantastic situations. They are at once acting, story-telling and wilfully suspending disbelief. As we grow up and get into middle school, the pressures of academic subjects is more but the ability to engage in fantasy role-play is still ever present. If nurtured from a young age, creativity and imagination in every child can also be tapped just as much as other cerebral skills and it can stay as a powerful tool that is ever present and a part of you in your adult professional life.



I am no expert with children. My strength actually lies in design, but what I would like to put forward here are a few suggestions for collaborative creative processes that I have experienced, especially in the field of set and prop design that can be easily used in school plays to enrich the experience for all.

Lets start with a clean slate, or shall I say an empty stage. First ask yourself if the performance you are building towards need to happen on a formal stage or whether it can take place in an informal setting or outdoors. The next question would be do we need to fill it at all? The most commonly used solution is the back-drop. A large stitched canvas with a static scene painted on it. It gives a sense of context and background scenery. Often, our teachers would make us help with the painting and that was fun. But the back-drop never goes away. It can be covered by letting down something else in front of it, which requires certain infrastructure and resources. So a good question to ask ourselves at the very beginning would be whether the back-drop is needed at all. What is it you are trying to tell the audience with the back drop and can it be achieved either through acting or a few suggestive moveable props.

Another commonly used type of set, if resources permit, is the “box-set”. An L or C shaped stiff back-drop with entries and exits through it. Most commonly used if the setting is a room in a building, in which case the box-set has a door and a window and probably some hanging picture frames and so forth. The back-drop and the box-set usually try to create “real” looking scenes although we know that the audience comes in ready to suspend their disbelief. The box set also cuts off a chunk of your stage depth and limits your acting space.

One workshop that we commonly do with the actors in our group at the very beginning of rehearsals is an exercise called freeze frames. This exercise allows us to understand how much of context we can establish

on a stage using just actors and their bodies and no set at all. It can be a great and easy exercise to do with children too.

You start with your context. Lets say that in the story you are trying to tell, the scene is set at a train station . You take a group of upto ten actors and ask them to achieve a freeze frame of the scene. This is done by asking the first person to walk onto the acting space and strike a pose to establish the scene. For a train station, an actor could possibly mimic carrying something heavy, sleeping on the ground, running after a train and so on. The beauty of this exercise is that the list is actually endless and it is best to leave it to each actor (in this case the child) to come up with an idea on their own on the spur of the moment. It trains you to think on your feet, be spontaneous, creative and react to a situation. I believe that all these are important life skills apart from theatre skills.

Once the first person has struck their pose and frozen, the second person walks in and strikes a second pose that fits in with the same theme and in relation to what the first person has done. You gradually build on this to achieve a scene with all eight or ten people. If you have more actors, which is more than likely in a school, you can use the numbers to your advantage. Keep the first scene frozen and ask the other groups who are sitting out to critique it. What do they see. Where is the train, where is the platform, what is he doing. Does it look crowded, imbalanced, interesting, boring. Critical analysis is an important learning tool in this exercise.

A lot of our plays are first blocked out using freeze frames. By doing this exercise repeatedly you allow the actors to bring in a multitude of ideas on how the space can be used and you achieve many scene changes without complicated sets. But everything can't be achieved with just the body. Sometimes, a single prop can go a long way to establish what you are trying to say. So once we have exhaustively



worked on the freeze frames, we have a better idea of what sort of props we need.

These props can become real objects. For instance if you need a chair, you get chair. Or you could get something that doesn't look like a chair but just a cube or a block. Something that you can sit on, but in another freeze frame, someone could stand on it or lift it and carry it too. Multi-purpose props are great because they look clever, they involve the audience more and they cut down costs.

In order to get the best out of your props you need to workshop with them too. Introduce a set of exercises where the actors come up one by one and imagine a situation using a prop. You can use a single prop and get the actors to come up one by one and use it differently, something like my example with the chair. Again the idea is to let each actor think for themselves. The kind of ideas that emerge from these exercises always amaze me. We usually go from the first prop exercise into a freeze frame exercise combined with a few props. From there you pick out the best ideas and see what you can use in the final play.

Another great exercise in creativity which is also very easy on the pocket is the use of found objects as

props. Pick up interestingly shaped everyday objects. Each actor can be asked to bring one or the director (teacher) can bring a few as back up. The pool of props that you now have should cover a good range of shapes, sizes and weights. They can be anything found around the house, easily recognisable for what it is. Through workshops with these objects, you may find a lot of interesting possibilities. We have in the past done plays where a gramophone player was made up of a set of large cooking vessels where the LP records were a stack of ordinary dinner plates. A well in the corner of the garden was actually three truck tyres stacked one above the other and a Ganesha temple was fabricated in a few seconds by the actors putting together some brooms, baskets and cloth in a quick scene change.



A film poster in the play "Ms Meena" came from the freeze frame exercise



The point I'm trying to make is the more the minds you put together, the more the ideas and the fun. To allow for this to happen, time has to be given by the actors and the person or people conducting the workshop. This time invested will give rich dividends.



KALPANA BALAJI is an Architect who runs her own practice in Chennai. She has been a part of Perch, a Chennai based theatre and performance collective since its inception designing the sets and lights for their productions. Over the past few years Perch has travelled widely across India with several of their productions which include "Sangathi Arinhya – Have you heard", "Moonshine and Skytoffee" and "Ms. Meena". Kalpana can be contacted at kalpana@diagrammar.in



Ankit Pogula

Like most who have been to school, I felt I was assimilating so much of information every second that the word cramming seemed appropriate! What was troubling was not just the high intake, but not being able to express what ‘I’ thought, felt or understood.

How did we as young people see the world – did it seem happy, confusing or conflicting; what did we give importance to; what we liked/disliked vis-à-vis what others would want us to like? What did I think about happiness, family, success, school and friends? Despite writing several examinations and having filled up tonnes of answer sheets for 12 years, these were questions we never talked about till way beyond school. Some of these questions perhaps can only be addressed in an open space, where one gets time to engage with one self and can feel free to express.

Every child or individual has a natural desire to express oneself. The process of education seems incomplete without facilitating this expression. Expression isn’t just an extra-curricular activity but a curricular-activity, which can enhance the intake of a child. This is where Art plays such an important role. It gives an individual a creative vent of what’s going on within. Be it painting, performing arts or filmmaking, art is the window through which a child engages in being imaginative, creative and expressing his/her interpretation of the world!

Why ‘Film in Education’

I have been facilitating filmmaking workshops and showing various kinds of films around the country to children, youth and adults from all backgrounds and spaces. It’s been spectacular to observe how

everyone responds to the fascinating medium of film. But why films? Why are they so captivating? Apart from building skills of camerawork and editing, what role can it play for a student?

We humans are extremely visual creatures and love the use of our senses in communicating. We are constantly forming images to words, sounds and emotions. For instance, the moment we read the words ‘Mountains in the background, lush green fields and a stream running by,’ it immediately prompts off a series of images in our mind. A lot of our interpretation of the world is in this form. Success, happiness, fun, art - we have images associated with all of these. Music or sound can enhance or give a new dimension to these images. Put together, films create the possibility of maximum communication and evocation.

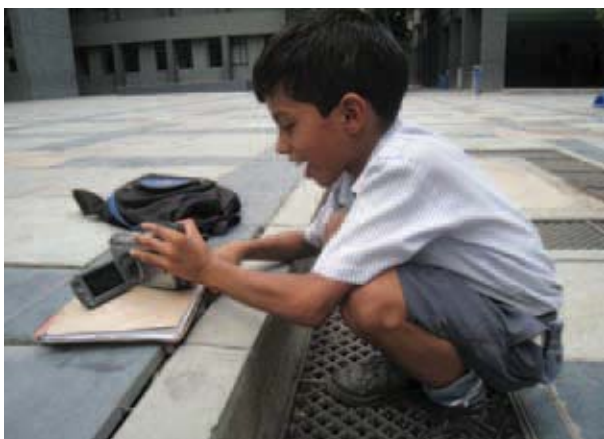
With the intense advent of information and visuals in the last decade, children today are exposed to a vast variety of audio-visuals through newspapers, television, advertisements and films. They are well informed and aware of a world even though it physically lies far beyond their daily routine of school, home and friends. A child today is able to think in a





multi-dimensional and a non-linear way much faster than ever before. As a result, there is definitely a more imaginative and challenging mind to engage.

The visual medium has the ability to captivate and satiate a child's (or every individual's) imagination. There are times when educators struggle to engage children on different subjects but I have seen how utilising the visual medium through short films and documentaries as part of education has jumpstarted a child's curiosity even on the most complex subjects like urbanisation, climate change, etc. This makes it even more essential for us as educators to use a medium like film to help engage such creative minds.



Child: An Observer and A Creative Storyteller

For the first few years of my exposure to films, documentaries etc. I often saw a lot of films on children and youth made by adult filmmakers. The children were the subjects of intrigue, of observation, of figuring out their minds to see what the future holds! I often wondered how would it be to have the subject (the child) as the observer and observe the world. In this process, I found the camera to be an empowering tool. With a camera in hand, one can see a diminishing need of words, sentences and structures to communicate. A child is able to pick and choose what

he/she wants to show, give different or new meaning to that and communicate perhaps a lot more clearly.

Nearly a decade of working in the field of education and being a video trainer, I myself have been surprised by how much I had 'assumed' of a child's creativity and the sense they can make of the world. In the course of facilitating scripting and visualisation in filmmaking workshops, I was startled to see the variety of perspectives individuals held, and how creatively they visualised things around them. And often these perspectives came from individuals who could not articulate so clearly in words as much as they effortlessly did with the camera and films.

Once in a film workshop in Delhi, I was facilitating a group of students to come up with a story for a one-minute film on recycling. After much debate of how to visualise a very 'done' thing and steering away from having a film with a lot of statistics, an innovative suggestion was to have a conversation between an old and a relatively-new shirt in a dustbin and how recycling was the lifesaver for the new cloth! The entire exercise and how to shoot the shirts talking was a challenge. Students came up with the idea of faces being painted on shirts worn by students, the chest-part would be the face and the hands would move for expression. It was an innovative script written, shot and edited by students in 5 days. I was surprised with the creativity, ingenuity and the enthusiasm. The same quiet bunch of 20 had turned into a meaningfully engaged, creative and highly charged group!

Meaning behind the Aesthetics

Expression is an essential part of every individual's existence. It takes various forms such as, music, poetry, writing, dancing, painting, films, etc. As we delve deeper into a particular form, we start excelling in it and become more and more creative with it. Along with form, what's equally important is

the meaning/message behind that form/expression. ‘What’ does one want to say through this medium and why?

As both a filmmaker and an educator, I feel a strong sense of responsibility to work on both aspects with a child – the meaning and the form. In fact, I have always found film to be a great medium to engage students on social and environmental issues and self-exploration. While facilitating workshops with students of Hyderabad and Chandigarh two years ago, through short documentaries and discussions I focused on the relationship the students felt with their cities and if it entailed anything beyond one’s house and school? We watched some films on urbanisation, environment to further explore urban living. Films did what so many years of living in the city couldn’t! They could see many more interconnections of pollution and waste with urban lifestyle.

Once they felt that connection, they were naturally motivated to know the city historically and document it visually. It was amazing to see how there was such a turnaround when students started researching the environmental situation of the city for the film. In due course, we visited drains, sewage canals, filthy backyards; city’s hidden spaces behind malls and multiplexes. It was a thrilling experience and interesting to see how the students captured the same city with their camera - the same city with the same visuals but with such a different perspective!

I feel with clarity within oneself on what one wants to communicate, there is a jump in one’s creativity and artistic ability as well. To me, the clearer the meaning one wants to communicate, the more motivated he/she feels to express it creatively. The more creative he/she is, the larger group of people he/she is able to cater to. Thus, meaning or core content goes hand in hand with creative expression.



Borrowed vs. Original Aesthetics – The Challenge

While I was studying in school, I was part of the debating and dramatics team. But I often felt that what I spoke or performed was not what I wanted to say or how I wanted to perform. It was a lot of what teachers or house captains thought would win us the prize, what kind of speeches or plays were in vogue or would appeal to the audience. It was a lot about what ‘sounds’ or ‘looks good’, not what I felt. It was like mouthing someone else’s words and how to speak – in other words, a borrowed sense of aesthetics.

This did impact and limit my creativity and took me a while to find my own ground with my imagination and my own sense of aesthetics. Why didn’t I perform the way I feel comfortable? Should the teacher have worked on my aesthetics and developed them or asked me to pick up an entirely new sense of aesthetics?

As an educator and a video trainer, I can see how subconsciously we maneuver young people or children towards a message or ‘our’ aesthetic sense. Often, this gets the child to feel that their natural sense of aesthetics isn’t good enough! I feel that for us educators, this is the biggest challenge to work on and if not addressed, can deeply damage a child’s confidence in his/her ability to express and be artistic.



We need to first allow the child to express himself/herself freely and then help facilitate the process towards translating the expression into a film, story or any other art form. Also, the longer and more continuously students are exposed to a medium, the finer they pick up the nuances and get even more creative.

With the onset of digital media and younger and younger students being exposed to computers and

cameras, we have a generation of individuals at home with technology. Simultaneously, there is a need to give them a stimulating and creative engagement with that technology. Filmmaking as part of education offers that engagement. There is tremendous scope not only in expressing oneself creatively and artistically through films but also being able to access one's inner self.



ANKIT POGULA is an independent filmmaker, based out of New Delhi and runs a production company Tuning Fork Films that engages in making documentary films and conducting filmmaking workshops. Having studied Masters in Mass Communication from Jamia Milia Islamia, Delhi, Ankit has been using film as a medium to explore issues of Development, Media & Identity with urban and rural youth across India. He can be contacted at ankitpogula@gmail.com

Let Me Arise, Let Me Awake.

Let me arise
From rough stone, hard rock
Let me raise myself
Shoulders hunched, leaning forward
Let me stand erect.

Let me recite
From unspoken words, mute stillness
Let Poetry emerge
Beaded Words, strung to each other
Set my Muse free.

Let me sing
From unsung notes, unheard tunes
Let me pluck a melody
Entwined sounds, aligned together
Release the flow in harmony.

Let me paint
Into a rainbow of hues, a cloud of colour
Let me dip my eager brush
From quilted palette to yearning canvas
Let me soar into my own landscape.

Let me dance
To unfelt rhythms, to subtle beats
Let my movements ripple
With silken steps in sync
Let me spring free of all bondage.

Let me arise
From the light within, banishing darkness
Let me illuminate
Dispelling ignorance, knowing my Self
Let me Awake.

- **Neeraja Raghavan**, Azim Premji University



Section C

Personal Reflections

19 And Dance We Did...



Chitra Chandrasekhar Dasarathy

“It is not bad to go wrong”, the eight year old said to me. I thought to myself - she is right. I need to find a way for her to get beyond the mistake!

We then got into the reason that may have caused all the repeated problems in dancing the particular adavu. “Is it just that you are unable to understand it or is it that you haven’t tried it enough times?” I asked. The body has to learn to adapt to the demands of each movement. In the subsequent conversation the little girl and I agreed that it was a bit of both. In a classroom for dance, understanding - or the lack of it - becomes evident immediately to both the teacher and the student.

I dance and teach Bharatanatyam. The dance form has a well defined vocabulary of movement and it is important to learn the basic structures of the dance in such a manner that at a later stage, one is able to roam freely within the technique to express and communicate. Dancing for me is a journey to create a world beyond the spoken word, perceive aspects of life that are (most of the time) enchanting, at others - even painful, but always interesting and exciting. There are stories I want to tell, feelings I want to communicate and experiences I wish to share.

Teaching dance necessitates developing a skill which is evolving constantly. Dance presents new challenges to the teacher because the same movement manifests differently in each dancer. The initial challenge for the teacher and student of classical dance lies in disciplining the body to work in a certain prescribed manner. As in many other classrooms, dance learning initially happens by imitation. A child imitates the movements of the teacher and over a

period of time, the movements of the Dance begin to feel like her own. This is similar to how one learns to speak in particular language. Slowly, the familiarity and ease with the movement increases and the expression becomes more and more communicative. The student now begins to relate more meaningfully with the movement, the dancing space, and the content in the dance.

I find that children connect with abstraction within the movement patterns of Bharatanatyam. They are comfortable to play with these patterns without getting into specific meaning or stories. Even repetition, which is tedious, can be turned into an exciting experience with the introduction of a bit of variation in terms of rhythms, or just by making the child stand in a place different from where he or she stood earlier. Another exercise which I find extremely useful is breaking a movement into smaller units between children in a group. In the traditional teaching of Bharatanatyam, the basic movements have been taught in stages as well. The footwork is learnt first, followed by movements of the body and finally, the hand gestures complete the movement.

Along with the physical practice of a movement, I find that most children’s perception of an “adavu” - or a basic sequence of Bharatanatyam movement - improves if they are able to visualise it. We call this exercise “do it in the mind”. After trying a new movement, the child is asked to close her eyes and try to see the particular sequence danced perfectly in her mind’s eye. Later, when they open their eyes and try it again, I have more often than not been stunned – initially, the dance seems to get free of the glaring



mistakes and later, the perfection that each child saw in her mind's eye begins to appear visibly. The visual memory complements the practice.

Exploring within one's ability to speak with the body can be an exciting and enriching experience. A dance studio is a space where the process of learning has an immediacy which can be rewarding for both the teacher and the student. By their very nature, dance and all performing arts exist in the very moment they are practised in. Therefore, seeking excellence is a constant and unending process. The child learns that the moment of excellence is found - and it can also be lost - almost immediately!

The world around us is constantly oscillating between movement and moments of stillness. Most children are naturally interested in this gamut of movement in people and the world around. In the classroom, a young child can be taught to internalise these movement patterns through dance. The skill to harness this is honed through—observation, imitation, repetition and finally, nuanced practice to turn it into an artistic expression. Beyond the actual learning of dance movements (which are highly codified and standardised in the basic training of classical Indian dance forms), I like to encourage the child to become observant of small nuances in moving things while trying to copy the teacher's dance movements. One can, for example, get a child to watch with care how leaves of varied shapes and sizes move in the breeze.

It can also be extremely exciting - and later fruitful - if the young student learns to analyse the natural logic (or the lack of it) within a certain adavu. In this process, imitation is the first step, followed by a spontaneous analysis and shortly the movement becomes natural for this young dancer. In a dance class, there is training both at the mind level and body level – as both of them have their own “intelligence” and need to be trained to act in unison. This process helps at a fundamental level, to understand the underlying method for learning.

I like to call this “body intelligence”. Very often, one may find that even though the mental understanding of something is complete, yet, actually executing it is far more difficult. The body may resist a particular movement or the mind may just interfere! A similar situation may arise in learning /teaching, a meaning-based dancing (commonly known as expressive dance or “Abhinaya”). Here, the student would have to create characters and their emotions with the help of appropriate facial expressions and hand gestures. Almost everyone expresses emotions through facial expressions yet when one is asked to ‘act’ an expression it seems so much harder, without any stimuli to evoke the feeling. The observant child can be helped to create an imaginary space or person or even a conversation with which she can relate, so that she is able to bring a certain personal quality into a piece of dance.

The immediacy mentioned earlier also infuses an enhanced level of focus and attentiveness for most children learning dance—where repetition does not remain a mechanical exercise but one that leads to what one of my students in all seriousness called “good dance”. Repeated practice or Abhyaasa or Riyaz as an ideal path to excellence has been the guiding principle in the traditional teaching of Indian art forms. Children can, and often do enjoy repetition and practice even more, if one is able to lace it with humour and constant parallels from their world outside the dance floor. At a later stage (surprisingly soon) most children are able to transfer the fundamental concept within this learning methodology to other areas of learning.

Dance does help to build a certain level of awareness and sensitivity. One is constantly surprised at how easily children respond to subtle levels of awareness, be it of physical or emotional. Teaching dance to children is often as energising as dancing oneself.

While working with some young children with special needs—I spent months singing a nursery rhyme



with simple movements. One little autistic girl paid no attention to me for months. I just sang and danced with the other children in the group. One day, as I walked into the room for our usual class, this child walked up to me wordlessly, didn't meet my eyes, picked up my hands and placed them on my waist - just as I had done all these months, then, bent her

head and started swaying. All I could do was to join her and continue the song and dance. Ironically, the song in Tamil was "Aadu Paapaa Aadu, Azhagu Paapa Aadu,--Dance, beautiful baby, dance!"

And Dance we did!



Trained in Bharatanatyam from a very early age by her parents, Prof. C V Chandrasekhar and Smt. Jaya Chandrasekhar, Chitra has travelled long in her pursuit of expression and excellence. Her dance gives expression to her aesthetic sensibility as an artist of our times and her complete identification with the dance form. Chitra holds a Master's degree in Dance and Sanskrit. Her involvement with other creative modes of expression like music and literature give her dance and choreography a wider perspective. Chitra's precision in technique and sensitivity in presentation have been her strengths, much appreciated by her audiences. Her choreographic works apart from the traditional repertoire of Bharatanatyam include Geetagoinda, Samvada — Hathor and I, Utsava, Vismaya Kuncha, Vagartha, Ratiranga and Kunti. Based in Bangalore, Chitra continues to perform, teach and choreograph. She can be contacted at chitracdasarathy@yahoo.com



Sharik Hasan

One must tune into what one's natural inclinations and talents may be, and once aware, nurture them.

I did not choose music, but rather, music chose me.

This may sound trite but being a full time musician was not a path I had considered, or was even able to conceive of. Once steeped in it, it was the only thing that gave me a true sense of enjoyment and fulfillment. This became more apparent during my final year as an undergraduate at Oberlin College, in the US, where I was majoring in English Literature and Mathematics.

However, this love of music is certainly not something that materialised all of a sudden out of thin air, as I can trace its presence in my life back as far as I can remember. I recall my early childhood, when my parents would put on their favourite albums and radio stations whether at home or in the car, in addition to taking me to attend Western and Indian classical music concerts. My mother, a painter by métier, was a keen pianist as well, continuing to fill the house with cascading musical passages from Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Debussy that she played on our old inherited upright. The fact that there was



already a piano around was crucial, for it was something I – as a five-year-old – was instinctively drawn to, inspiring wonder and excitement. Shortly after seeing my natural affinity to the instrument, my parents arranged for me to take lessons with a teacher, and thus began my formal training.

Over the years I had a number of teachers in India and abroad, including stints at the Bangalore School of Music and Longy School of Music in Boston. All this was, of course, side-by-side with my regular academics, schoolwork, and sports – just another extra-curricular activity that I participated during weekends. In fact, I also started learning the sitar but could not find the time, or perhaps the discipline, to do justice to both instruments and so stuck to piano. By the time I was in high school, I was barely practising even the piano, being disillusioned by the seemingly relentless routine of playing only in order to prepare for the next round of Royal School of Music and Trinity College examinations, as if it were some sort of rat race to reach grade 8 the soonest. Around 12th standard, I quit music altogether, neither going for lessons nor playing for nearly a year.

It was during this period that I was able to purge myself of all the negative elements that had somehow crept into my relationship with music: the pressures of passing examinations with distinction and surpassing ones fellow pupils, in conjunction with a string of moody and impatient teachers, made sitting at the piano more of an obligation, an unpleasant chore. I immersed myself in other aspects



of school life such as socialising, classes, sports, interschool tournaments, board exams, and applying to colleges.

One day, I found a few of my friends in the music room at school singing a popular song while trying to figure out the chords on guitar. I went over to the piano and began to play along, suggesting the correct chords, much to everyone's surprise and delight. That afternoon, in that casual setting, playing music stirred the dormant, yet distantly familiar feelings of carefree enjoyment – perhaps for the first time since my first attempts at pottering on the instrument as a toddler. I felt a thrilling sense of liberation at being able to creatively engage with what I was doing, a sense of relevance at being able to participate in it with other people and make a valuable contribution. It seemed like some of the skills I had acquired during those years of study were paying off and serving a useful purpose after all.

When the time came to choose a college, I knew it had to be one that had some kind of musical environment with good facilities and access to pianos, though my focus was of course in arts and sciences. Oberlin College seemed an ideal fit, being a top liberal arts college that shared its campus with one of the best music conservatories in the country. Upon arriving there, I was shocked to see that some of my fellow-freshmen and dorm mates had, unlike me, come to study primarily music. It never occurred to me that one could possibly major in classical violin or jazz piano and make that your career, for until that point music for me, like for so many others growing up in India, was a respectable hobby – but no more than that.

To be fair though, my parents were extremely open-minded and flexible when it came to my career prospects, encouraging me to pursue whatever my interest lay in. However, I found a variety of subjects appealing. On the one hand, I had taken avidly to the sciences like my father, an astrophysicist, and on the

other, I was equally at home in the arts (my mother's domain), demonstrating a proclivity for literature and writing. As a result I ended up taking undergraduate classes in mathematics and physics in parallel with those in English literature and creative writing.

The other significant discovery I made at Oberlin was one that would, unbeknownst to me at the time, alter the course of my life irrevocably. This was the art form known as jazz music. It exposed me to a new world of rhythms, improvisation, creativity and spontaneity and its best, and an energetic and highly dynamic interaction between musicians that included the audience too. There's something intensely compelling about seeing all of this unfold before your eyes in real time, and that was what happened my first day of college as I walked into the freshman dormitory. I was at once captivated by the resonating sounds of a piano from down the hall, being played like I had never heard before. Needless to say, I followed the strangely novel yet infectious melodies to their source: a fellow-freshman, probably seventeen like me, skinny and altogether unassuming in appearance with reddish curly hair, hunched meekly over the keyboard, eyes closed and face contorted into a look of anguish as he hummed along and grunted with what he played. But there was certainly nothing meek about his piano playing – this was a man possessed, completely oblivious of his surroundings. I asked him later what piece he was playing, to which he replied that he was simply making it up as he went along! I was dumbfounded.

We became friends and he agreed to teach me for a small fee. Our lessons would turn into weekly jam sessions in which he guided me through my first tentative forays into the world of blues and jazz improvisation. Experiencing the thrilling sensation of being in the moment even once is enough to seek it out again and again, and here at Oberlin I found myself in the midst of an environment with no dearth of opportunities to hear live music being performed at an extraordinary level by visiting masters and stu-



dents alike. These experiences would in turn inspire me to go back and play with renewed passion and vitality, triggering a musical renaissance within.

After my third year, I took a semester off to return to India during which period I happened to participate in an open mic of sorts, at the end of a concert, at a popular Bangalore club. The owner at once booked me to do a concert there the following week – my first real gig – which in turn led to more gigs and soon I was performing all over India with my own band as well as accompanying well known names on the scene. This did a lot for my confidence, but it was also a revelation to see that I could do something purely for the love of it, be recognised and appreciated for it, and earn money too! It was indeed feasible to do this professionally. At this point it didn't matter anymore what other things I was capable of doing well or had had potential for, as I simply couldn't see myself doing anything else.

Before I over-romanticise anything, it must be said that a career in the arts does not come without some degree of uncertainty in terms of earning a steady salary. Education isn't cheap either and one may put oneself through years of rigorous training only to learn that there isn't a sure monetary payoff, or even a correlation between skill and commercial success. Though one's fate isn't necessarily doomed to mirror the starving artist cliché (I know plenty of exceptions), the truth is that one must be smitten enough to do it despite the potential difficulties.

What continuously inspires me to keep doing what I'm doing is when I see a whole group of people gathering together in one place to share a moment that has the capacity to move and uplift ones spirit. In facilitating this, you take on the role of a cultural ambassador, so to speak, that can impact those around you and be a part of exchange between different communities, giving you a voice in society and a responsibility to affect positive change. I am always inspired and humbled when I see the great

masters who do this on a worldwide scale, giving me something to strive for and reminding me that there is no end to learning.

How can more students be empowered to explore alternative career options such as this? Well, first of all, one must tune into what ones natural inclinations and talents may be, and once aware, nurture them. This process of self-realization shouldn't be forced, but rather, allowed enough time to take place of its own accord, manifesting itself at different rates and ages in different individuals.

To be empowered you must be driven and extremely self-motivated. Know that it is possible to succeed in anything if you commit yourself wholeheartedly to it. The famous phrase, "Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity," rings true; do whatever you need to in order to best prepare yourself should an opportunity arise, but that is not to say you cannot actively seek out or even create opportunities for yourself. Try to connect with experts in the field, asking their advice and finding out as much information as possible about the prospects and steps that can be taken. It might mean having to travel in order to find a good teacher or major hub for what you want to do.

In my case, I was fortunate to have parents who supported me during my education at Oberlin, the Bill Evans Piano Academy (Paris), Berklee College of Music (Boston), and now at Manhattan School of Music (New York City) where I'm doing my masters in jazz piano and composition. I knew that in order to take what I wanted to do to the next level, I had to be in a centre for music, with a diverse community of musicians that set the bar exceedingly high. At most of these institutions I was able to get scholarships, without which such an education would not have been possible for me. There are often opportunities for scholarships at educational institutions but also look into funding from grants that might be offered in certain fields by government and private organizations.



All this requires a good deal of initiative, research, time and persistence. Almost any goal is achievable: just prepare for it as much as you can and take steps that will gradually get you closer to it, even if it takes time.

I feel deeply gratified to have been able to realize myself in some way and encouraged to see my own progress and evolution over the years, having achieved what I have so far despite the initial lack of opportunities for it, growing up in India and get-

ting a relatively late start in the game (going to show that it is never too late!). Of course, I wish I could have had the realization that this was what I wanted to do even earlier, and that more young people had the chance to do so. My hope is that, with a strong arts and music foundation at the school level, students will start to see the range of possibilities that is open to them.



SHARIK HASAN is one of the leading pianists and composers of his generation to emerge from India. He spent several years studying jazz and classical music in France and the USA while also working in Indian classical musical traditions. He was awarded scholarship to Berklee College of Music where he was selected to be part of a special honors program, the Berklee Global Jazz Institute, under the tutelage of Danilo Pérez. He has performed at venues all over the world including the Blue Note (New York), Panama Jazz Festival, and Nancy Jazz Festival (France). He can be contacted at sharik.hasan@gmail.com

Making a Mark- From Untamed Scribbles to Wholesome Art

– Payal Hiranandani

You may be surprised to know that every one of us has the ability to draw and it is hidden. Betty Edwards gives a good insight as to how to see like an artist and come to a stage where you can get your drawings laminated in a short span of time.

This book is not particularly written for someone who wants to be an artist or has a good amount of talent for drawing. It is for anyone who might not have tried to draw after a young age but had this itch at the back of his mind to learn how to draw. It gives a basis for hands-on comparison, not only to great artists but to yourself before and after you acquire perceptual skills. In fact, it unfolds your creativity to get into the depths of those techniques of observation that have been researched and then used over the years in the name of Art.

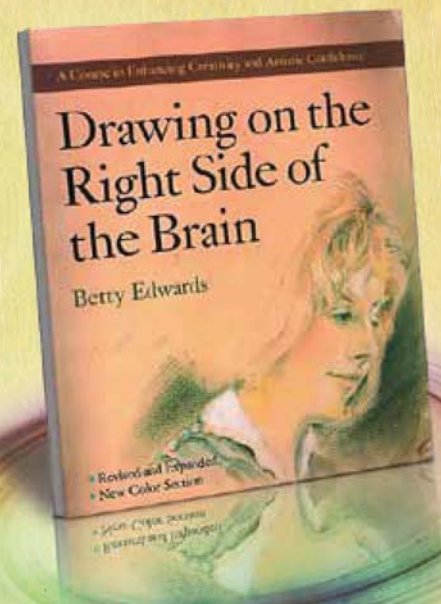
Many of us who were initially interested in drawing form and figures, lose interest by age 9 or 10 after which we may have little or no practise in the domain. So as we reach adulthood, we expect ourselves to draw like adults, and are totally put off when we find that our skills are no better than the time we left at 9 or 10. So we must sort this out- is drawing different from other

life skills like driving and reading? An artist learns the logical progression from line to value to colour to painting. He must possess the ability to see clearly and draw.

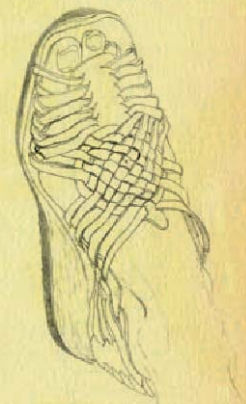
This is an important aspect which is discussed here. When you see in the special way in which experienced artists see, then you can draw.

A creative person is one who can turn a mundane ordinary data into a new creation. It requires the understanding of the two modes of information processing- often the dominant left side of the brain that continually tries to take over the right side, preventing a person from seeing things existing in the mind's eye. What is prescribed here is a good dosage of the right side in order to develop our right brain to draw pictures of our perception by turning off or leaving the logical, analytic, time-conscious left side in the background.

As we are mostly not aware of what goes on inside our brain, the author makes a strong point of being able to recognize the shift from the left mode to the right. Edwards's assumption is that the logical left brain, which is dominant, perceives in symbols and "recognizes" objects in the visual world as belonging to



classes of those symbols; so it interferes with the right brain's ability to simply see what things really look like when trying to draw them. Your left brain says, 'The moon is just a round shaped object', and prevents your right brain from seeing that the moon inside has a much more complex and asymmetrical shape.



Example of contour drawing

However, we must note that all drawing is the same - one drawing task is no harder than the other. Once the eye learns how to see through realism, it can more or less interpret all it sees into drawing.

Many art books tend to speak of 'ideas' but don't really tell you how to achieve an idea. This book contains a number of Instructional exercises on Art - mental exercises

that are used to strengthen the right brain and force the left brain into the background.



Joan Miro's 'Personages with star' (1933)- example of composition

There are exercises that the author has developed as well as traditional drawing methods that she has used, all based on letting your creativity flow. It tells us of a whole number of strategies and how drawing can get as automatic as a toddler learning how to walk.

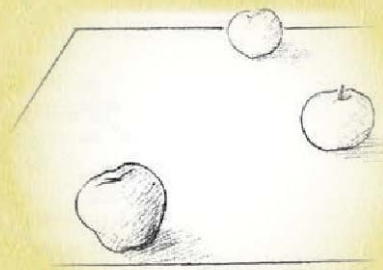
She has touched on topics such as composition (the way the components of a drawing are arranged), negative space drawing which contribute to the interest and balance of the composition, the use of a handy view finder, an aid to perception of a drawing. She has not used the usual methods of teaching perspective, such as the point method but has instead focused on sighting (observing angles and comparing lengths and widths).



PAYAL HIRANANDANI is a graduate in Commerce from the University of Pune. Though she does not hold any formal degree in Art, she has been regularly attending various art classes. It intrigues and fascinates her to see how different things in everyday life can be interpreted in so many different ways, in drawing and painting. Her other interests include writing, reading, animation, poetry and music. She has worked in the BPO and animation industry in the past. She can be contacted at payal.hiranandani@gmail.com

The upside down drawing, mirror images, the contour drawing (not being able to see what you're drawing) of say a hand, bypasses the symbol system and allows you to draw edges just as they are. If you like jigsaw puzzles, try thinking of every piece as separate and then joining all of them to form an image or object. That's how interesting drawing can be!

Other than this, she has also touched upon aspects of shading and colour, a skill most desired by students.



An example of sighting

These exercises help us understand why we can't draw and describe it in detail to guide us through a process of getting over a particular shortcoming.



A before and after portrait drawing

Any one pursuing drawing should be able to make his audience feel for his soul in his art. It does not matter whether the appearance and personality is expressed as much as the viewer feels the emotion that is being conveyed. Paradoxically, it is said, the more the artist sees his surroundings, the more clearly we see through the likeness of an artist. Thus, we know that a drawing is simply a reflection of a side of you that is beautiful and blissful with the kind of energy in you generated in your work.

This book definitely tells a novice how to get his own drawing style as a unique expression to convey to the world. It is important to believe what you see. It can be used as a self-study course for someone really motivated to learn how to draw. I believe anybody can be taught to see, and with that in place, drawing should come naturally.



Neeraja Raghavan

Unlike most schools, the Valley School (Krishnamurthi Foundation India), Bangalore has adopted the practice of bringing the artisan to the school, so that traditional art is taught to the children (and even the parents of the children as well as anyone who is interested) by practicing craftsmen and artisans from various parts of the country, along with the art teachers. Many artisans are hired as instructors and are faculty in the school, while some are invited from their rural pockets - every two months - as part of the ongoing OUTREACH programme. The intent is to learn by observing them work, and to work along with them - in spite of the differences in language and culture – and this school has found that the sheer pictorial language which their hands speak makes interaction between learners possible. The Learning Curve spoke to some of the faculty to understand this unique practice.

What sort of Art Education programme does Valley School offer?

Dr. Satish Inamdar, Director, Valley School says: “In our school, everything is compulsory for the child from age 5 to age 14. A boy has to learn to dance, a girl has to learn drama...everything everyone has to do, because afterwards a boy or girl may take to something, but to me, a school is a place where the only thing we can do is to provide exposure. Beyond that, we cannot do anything. Ultimately, it is left to the child to develop a relationship with Nature and all the fineness of art will emerge. From Junior School to Middle School (class I to VIII), our children spend one-fifth of their time in the Art Village. Senior children do Art for the examination also, quite a few of them do painting, music, etc. They get half

a day. We call it ‘participatory art’ and ‘examination art’. Senior students get to do both. Krishnamurthi has talked about participatory consciousness. We are more interested in this sort of art, whether it is folk singing or dancing together. My experience is that it is very difficult to get people to intellectually come together in dialogue, but people can come together in dance and singing, etc. So considering all these factors, we kept on enriching the Art Village. It is a very rare kind of institution which has got created. We have fifteen people working here, and we have created pavilions and open spaces, and we also have an amphitheatre.”

Where does all this fit into the very purpose of education?

“Creating the foundation for sensitivity is - to me - the basic purpose of every school. We are really attempting all that. We see to it that outside artisans come. Their art is so varied. India fortunately has this diversity: so much diversity is not seen everywhere in the world. With minimal things, people work. There is a holistic perspective which is left to children to pick up.”

Is it expensive for a school to set up such an engagement of artist and artisan?

“It is quite a big set up for a school. We have been lucky that many people have taken interest in this. It takes time for anything to become a culture. It is not as expensive as people feel: but our priorities are so stiff, linked to Math, computers, science, etc. Why can't we give the same amount of time to Art and Nature and Sports? Because only then do children



learn in a better way. If we put children in four walls, schools become hatcheries. The chaos in today’s world is because education has taken the wrong turn. If we really decide to do this, we can, but our priorities are wrong. They are for nuclear weapons, not for nutrition. It is not that we don’t have the resources in the world, we spend it wrongly.”

Nalini Jayaram, teacher and coordinator of many outreach programmes in the Art Village, says their Art Programme is also one way of bridging the urban-rural divide. Art builds bridges beyond cultural barriers, says Nalini, and learning happens by observing one another, and by self discovery. A creative mind is always open. “You don’t need big infrastructure, but you do need an attitude, perspective and a way of seeing things deeply. Prakriya, Bangalore has also started this process with weavers. Eighty kids weave every day. They have identified a local potter; their teachers came and learnt some basic carpentry, now they have even hired a carpenter...so the process is ongoing there now.”

“Right from a pre-school, instead of having too much of the other forms of learning - the three R’s - if they are amongst land and Nature and crafts persons, that kind of learning will go a long way in feeding intuitive learning.”

“Everything is so fed, so teacher-centred, that the urge to learn and explore, make things is missing. We are very product-driven, we may appreciate and buy these things in a mall, but we don’t know where these things come from, what are the materials involved. I feel at least new schools should look into these things.”

“Music, dance, art, theatre - all are under the same umbrella here. Over time, these have become the strong face of the school. People identify the Art Village with the school. Our OUTREACH programmes in the Art Village are open to anyone anywhere in the world; we charge a nominal fee for materials etc.,

so that those who don’t have facilities and structures can participate in these programmes.”

Nalini goes on to highlight the benefits that can be derived from a sound Art education, by specially-abled children: “We had some dyslexic and hearing impaired students as part of this Art Programme, and today each one of them has found a vocation. One student has secured admission in a Fine Arts College. Another student - who was very dyslexic - has become a teacher in a special school, and she is taking Art and craft in that place, and she is taking care of two Down’s syndrome children.

A student who was hearing impaired was keenly interested in art and craft. Her own determination and understanding has found her a place in an art college. She was extremely observant when the weaver from Assam was showing pattern-making on the loom. Such are the abilities of someone who has this urge to create, to learn, irrespective of whether they are “normal” or with “learning difficulties”. Even the weaver who was here would look out for that girl: she would ask: Where is she today? She picks up so well!

Another boy who changed eight schools in ten years and was branded ‘highly dyslexic’ - “can’t read more than three-four letters” - was here for three years and





has now joined Mysore Art College. These children gained self esteem, when parents/society said they were ‘good for nothing’, they found a space which made them feel they too were unique and good at something. With a little training, they grew.”

Do artisans also learn from each other here?

“A weaver had come...she stays in an island in Brahmaputra: Maajhuli, an island, a Heritage site. She is a Master, a National Award winner. She met our resident weaver from Karur (Tamil Nadu) and the idea was to enrich an already existing weaving unit. They learnt from each other...they explored the commonness in both weaving traditions.”

How do the artisans from different parts of the country communicate with each other?



“Language of the hands is another language of communication. One weaver spoke Tamil and the other spoke Hindi/Assamese! But they understood each other perfectly. The moment she said: You have to pull like that, he knew what she was saying. There was no problem. This is the way I do it, we do it here, was the response.”

Have you ever found the artisan who comes here missing his/her old world? Once they join here as faculty, do they express a need to go back to their old way of life?

“The artisans who we have here are already semi-urban, they had already moved out of their villages even before they came to our school. For instance, the carpenter was working in one of the villages in Tamil Nadu and he had relocated to Karnataka to make furniture. We were told about him and we felt he could join us as a wood craft person and we would not just ask him to make furniture but to work on wood as a medium for expression. So he has slowly moved out of making shapes and structures and functional pieces of wood, now he works with various mediums of wood. His whole approach has changed. They move away from the utilitarian view and then: art and craft mix. And he now grumbles when he has to do maintenance work, he no longer enjoys working on it just for utilitarian purposes! Give me a log, he says, can I carve? The moment you say let’s work on the log, he will make time for it. There is a personal dialogue with the medium, the wood that now becomes alive, whether someone buys it or not becomes immaterial. The very making of it is very intense.

“You see it as an evolving journey; I am moving in an unknown direction...I don’t know where it will lead. Real creativity happens in uncharted territory. This space has even allowed an artisan to move along this journey. That’s what our attempt is also. Not just to keep them as instructors, rather, can there be growth



for everyone? Everyone who is entering this space... not only the student. Everyone who steps into this space, can they feel like making something, a self-discovery happening silently- while remaining open and tentative.

Children touch things and feel they ‘know’, ‘Ah, I know, I can make it.’ But only once they try and make it do they realize that it is tough, and this brings a certain humility. But it has become a habit to say ‘I know’ even if you know just two or three things. This has become like a disease in urban communities today, just because you can Google search and get information. But you can’t Google search and make Art.” Art is not created that way, without the actual experience of expression from within, with a certain silence deep down.



On the subject of weaving and the story behind the looms in the Art Village, Nalini has this to say: “We can create a simple loom, see, like the one alongside, which is from Santiniketan. The making of a loom is in itself an art form. Working on this loom demands a certain precision. When a weaver from Assam came, she set up an indigenous looms made of bamboo. It was a way of preserving traditional knowledge indirectly. How to preserve ancient wisdom is one of our concerns - that was the reason we called in a weaver from Assam. We wanted to have such a loom, and so we invited her here despite the huge expense involved.

“Just the presence of such people does something



to the children...no books, nothing, you just see something is happening here, something is happening there...the other day, students were working eight to nine hours at a stretch on weaving, and not once did they say they were bored. So the mind which is so restless with books - has such a short attention span - can be disciplined in this art form. Everything is not entertaining here, everything is not stimulation...until he makes those 100 metres of yarn, the whole process cannot begin. So it is so different from the present scenario of instant gratification, ‘I am so bored, what else can I do?’”

Don’t you face a language problem when you interact with the artisans?

Chandan, the Pottery Teacher, responds thus: “No, there is no need for language when the hand is working and the mind is working. The Orissa craftsmen know Hindi. Our children enjoy working with them: there is no need for talking. While working, the Dogra artisans are singing, on one side a fire is burning, and on another side, they are melting wax, and work is going on, children enjoy...the craftsmen explain...”

What do you think of Art being taught in most mainstream schools: with no contact at all with the artisans?



Metal casting - Dokra

Says Shwetal, the Art Teacher: “I think it is a huge loss. In some ways, art cannot be taught by Art experts. It cannot be taught, for one. It has to be experienced. This is my belief. I cannot validate this. And, in some sense, art which comes from within: what they do is not to produce something. It has been home grown, they were doing it to embellish their own clothes, so there would be no affectedness in the way they present their work. They do it to the best of their ability and that cannot be taught. It has to be felt. And when these people come and work, and when they interact, it is something that I - who have learnt from a book - cannot teach. As a professional, now, after many years, I feel that when I learn from an expert craftsman, is when I really even begin to understand something.”

During one of their regional painters’ camp, an art student from an Art College came and asked if he could also do something. Seeing extra stones, just lying around, he worked on some and evolved this out of it. “An artist’s brain can figure out, infuse the idea, you see, and build on it from things that are just lying around. It won’t get caught with I need this and I need that. So one such example is this. He was just walking around, he was not even

a participant of the camp, and he saw these stones stacked here after some construction work... he has used acrylic paint on the stones. It won’t last long, but what does that matter?” asks Nalini. “He put things together and made this story: now see here, people from the village side are going to build cities, migrating to the concrete jungle in search of jobs, and people from the city move towards Nature. See? Rural folk sitting on sacks, in hordes, going in search of employment, and building structures.”

I came away thinking that it was precisely a story such as this (See pictures on next page) that such an initiative - where the artist and artisan join hands - is transforming!



Phad Chitrakar from Rajasthan



Pata Chitrakar



A story in stone



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Natesh Ullal

All learning was happening through experience and reflection. The children were observing, thinking, discovering, examining and acting upon their understandings.

I was observing her. She stood there confidently, connected the camera to the projector, and pressed the ‘play’ button. Puttamma cooking millet porridge played out. Well composed shots from attractive angles and the fact that there wasn’t any camera shake suggested that the shots were the handiwork of somebody who has been a long time user of video cameras. “Which team shot this video?” I asked with some excitement. “I did it”, Rashmi said proudly. “We needed this shot for our film and since the others in my team were busy this morning; I went alone at 6.30 am to shoot this”. I looked at the other kids in her team, they all nodded. It was still difficult for me to process this.

Only two weeks ago I was passing video cameras to the children, asking them to hold, feel and explore the camera as I explained its parts and functions to them. Of all the children present Rashmi was the only one who appeared very nervous and was scared to even touch the camera. When egged by her peers to handle the camera, she just passed it onto the next person without even looking at it. Later I made four groups on the basis of the class they were studying in. Each group was given a video camera and was asked to shoot whatever they find interesting, with a rider that everyone in the team should get to use the camera. It was a fun-for-all session and everyone freaked out with the camera in hand. A screening and feedback session followed where everybody showed what they had shot and others shared their

thoughts on those images. When Rashmi’s turn came she had nothing to show. I thought she would come up with some excuse for not doing her work; instead she just kept staring at the floor. The next day saw a repeat of the same scene. As Rashmi is extremely nervous and introverted, I presumed that the others in her team were not giving her the opportunity to handle the camera. On day three, I asked the team to ensure Rashmi’s involvement in the entire process of shooting. They were also cautioned that if Rashmi didn’t shoot any footage; their group will not get to lay their hands on the camera anymore. Suddenly for these 7th standard kids, the issue had become existential! I could see them discussing the issue very seriously within their group. Sometime later when they walked out with the camera, I could read from their looks that they had worked out a crisis management strategy. I was curious to find out how they’ll solve the issue, and followed them. What I saw was astonishing. All other members of Rashmi’s group had become her mentors! They were encouraging her, guiding her, helping her understand the camera! Rashmi was finally operating the camera.

All the teams came back and screened the videos they shot. Then it was Rashmi’s turn to show her shots. Everybody burst into laughter upon seeing the first shot itself. The shots were extremely unsteady and some of the shots were even upside down. I shifted my look from the screen to Rashmi, she wasn’t there! She had just disappeared when everybody burst into

laughter. I asked my co-facilitator Ini to look for Rashmi. A few minutes later Rashmi walked in hesitantly, holding onto Ini for support. Her eyes were filled with tears, looked tense and uneasy, and kept staring at her safe haven - the floor.

It was hard to believe that it is the very same Rashmi who is bubbling with confidence now. That too in just two weeks! She had managed the shoot all alone, had taken shots with steady hands, and now was proudly showing the video to others! It was a moment of revelation for me. The space in front me was filled with immense possibilities of change, transformation and growth. No doubt the visual medium is a powerful communication tool, but the space and the skills provided to master the language of visual communication can do so much more I thought.

It all started with a phone call. Sandeep Dinker from OnePeople Productions of Wales called me to share his thoughts on their International Schools Project. It sounded interesting. He also mentioned that they were looking for a partner school in India. The institution that came to my mind was Deenabandhu Children's Home in Chamarajanagar. When the idea was shared with the founder of Deenabandhu Trust, Mr. Jayadev, he welcomed it saying 'it will be a wonderful programme for knowledge enhancement and will broaden the horizons of our children'. He immediately arranged a meeting with the teachers and children of Deenabandhu School. They seemed more than happy to be part of the project. Thus began the International Schools project.

What is this International Schools project?

OnePeople Productions, is a collective founded in Wales, which uses media to educate people on various issues. The collective believes very strongly in the ideology that People across the globe are fundamentally one, despite the differences in culture, language, ethnicity and class. One People believe that for this understanding to develop, interaction

between people from different cultures is necessary. Their pursuit of space for interaction culminated in the International Schools Project (ISP). ISP provides students with the space and opportunity to interact and communicate through the medium of film and the new media. It gives them the tools and imparts necessary skills to make a short film. The objectives of the project are:

- Understanding of different world views and perspectives.
- Changed world view and understanding cultural differences between people in different countries
- Understanding of Interconnectedness
- Empowerment to take action
- Improved language skills/communication skills
- Understanding the importance of team work and co-operation
- Learning project planning
- Developing interpersonal skills/building relations and networking(local and global)
- Initiating Critical thinking and reflection
- Development of technical skills - Film/Editing/IT

A school each in Wales and Sweden and two in India were to participate in the project. All participants from these four schools were to make video films on a theme of their choice by the end of a set time period. In the process they would learn how to choose the topic, do research on these topics, plan, shoot, edit as a team. Another important component of the project was communication/ interactions among these four schools through Skype and Facebook where they could share their thoughts and experiences with their counterparts, even provide feedback on raw footage, interviews, trailers uploaded. The project would end with a film festival, planned and designed by the students in each of the schools where all 12 films produced by the four schools involved in the International Schools Project are screened.



I volunteered as a facilitator. My responsibility was to facilitate the creation of an environment where students are able to participate in all aspects of the project, through discussion and by doing. It was a simple task of encouraging a bunch of 7th to 10th standard students to use the camera, think for themselves and to reflect on films, participate in discussions and the process of filmmaking for an audience removed from them.

Though in Sweden and Wales the project became part of the regular school process with a few dedicated hours every week for the video project, we couldn't afford to do the same at Chamarajanagar due to a lack of resources to engage a full time person and my inability to give dedicated time to the project owing to professional reasons. (Not to mention the 5 hour journey that I had to undertake to reach the project location.) So the summer holidays became a natural choice for all of us. Themes were chosen with the intent to explore and introduce their culture to an audience far away. The topics chosen by the Deenabandhu children were 'Our Folklore', 'Our Food', 'Subsidiary sources of income' and 'Jaggery making'. The first few days were spent on learning to film. After that they had to collect information on the topic chosen by them by reading, field visits and talking to people/subject experts. This they had to do on their own, without any adult support. If at all any adult accompanied the team it was for safety reasons, since the children sometimes had to move in unfamiliar terrains. Once they felt that they had enough information they sat down in groups for script development and production design. Though all of them were equally responsible for camera work and content creation, to facilitate the smooth flow of work each person in the team had to shoulder one responsibility like, Team Leader, Production Manager, Equipment-in-charge and Accountant. To facilitate effective production planning each team was allocated an imaginary sum of Rs. 25000 as working capital and they had to fix a value for equipment usage and use of

any other resource. The accountant's job was to keep track of expenses and caution the team if they were tending to overshoot the budget. They had to design the entire production keeping in mind the 'sum allocated' to them. I wasn't sure whether it was right to use word 'money' for calculating expenses, but it worked to some extent. I could see them calculating at the end of each day, and redesigning their production accordingly. But later on two of the teams didn't want to be disciplined and overshot the budget, and just smiled when I asked them why they are not in control of their production. But everyday all of them went through the footage they shot, had long discussions on missing elements, things that went wrong, and planned for the next day's production, even reaching out to unfamiliar adults they needed for the shoot.

The process of editing began using the school computers. After getting familiarised with the nuances of editing they went through their script/shots and planned the edit. After a few days the team which was working on 'Jaggery Making' realised that they didn't have enough shots, and asked me whether they can shoot for one more day. They didn't forget to point out that they were still within their allocated budget! "Fine, if other teams agree and if you have a list of shots you require", I said. Within an hour the required shot list was produced and consent from other teams taken!

The 10th std. Team, which was making a film on "Subsidiary Sources of Income", realised during the editing that all their shots were actually on the main source of income of the people they had documented. After a bout of despair, they asked me whether they can rewrite their script to weave a different film. I agreed and the next day they come back to me saying it was not working out as they can't find a thread to weave the story. I asked them to sit together and review the footage looking for a common element. When they came back I could see their eyes shining, "Every activity we have shot is nature friendly,



doesn't harm the environment and some of the activities are production of daily use items from waste". So "Subsidiary Sources of Income" became "Working Hands" and talked about local initiatives which recycled waste and created employment for many.

With the films completed, it was time to organise the film festival. Some volunteered to manage the event, some did the publicity work (designing the invitations, posters, writing the press note and holding/addressing the press meet), and others took the responsibility of translating and dubbing the films from the Swedish and Welsh schools to Kannada. They planned the event meticulously, rehearsed every bit of it and on the day - presented their films and the dubbed films for a 300 strong crowd comprised of children, their parents and others from nearby villages. Lokesh, the boy who had taken the responsibility of organising the event, had bargained hard with the service providers while hiring chairs, the public address system, etc., followed up to see that press was in attendance, and a zillion other things - said that the entire experience has given him so much of confidence that he felt confident about organising any event thereon.

This year was the second year of ISP and at Deenabandhu four teams again (including a new batch of 7th Std children) made four films in keeping with the broader theme provided by OnePeople -Environmental Problems, Equality and Justice. After three days of intensive discussion the kids decided on topics - Air Pollution, Water Pollution and Child Labour, the 4th team decided to make a music video on childhood. They attempted to contextu-

alise their understanding of the themes to their local reality. They just didn't look at symptoms but also explored underlying issues and searched for solutions. Exploring and an exposure to various people, institutions, and experiences helped them widen their perspective as well as clarify their conceptions. They never hesitated to track and investigate any new lead they got which was relevant to their chosen theme.

What unfolded before me was much more than films. All learning was happening through experience and reflection. They were observing, thinking, discovering, examining and acting upon their understandings. They exchanged ideas and enjoyed challenges. They had become confident and self-reliant. Through the process I realised that it was not about handing them a specific device or a medium, it was about ensuring the space and freedom for learning. It was their journey and I was just a fellow traveller, sometimes only an observer in a journey towards contextualising their understanding. Jayadev, Ini and I were constantly challenged to assist them to think and to reach their own conclusions, with as much stimulation, information and debate as we could muster. Over the past two years, as the kids at Deenabandhu explored issues with a video camera and kept reflecting on what they experienced, I have slowly begun to truly understand the meaning of the oft used words - facilitating children's learning.

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Umashankar Periodi

“We have to do something meaningful and sustainable”- declared my friend, quoting our community development lecturer. The result: We decided to conduct a creativity workshop for the children of our neighborhood - Attavara, a semi-slum area of Mangalore. We were six of us studying MSW course and stayed in that area. Keeping both the children's interest and our strengths and limitations we designed a 10-day workshop. The curriculum included theatre work, art work, clay modeling, puppetry, singing, storytelling and a lot of games. It was fun filled and the children enjoyed it thoroughly.

The workshop also produced a play by the children - “Kathale Rajya” (kingdom of darkness) – which was enacted in most of the parks of Mangalore city with the uninvited general public as the audience. It got extensive media coverage and elicited appreciation from the people.

Imagine our surprise when the Officers Club of Panambur invited us to conduct a similar workshop for the children of the port officers. We readily agreed. Based on our Attavara experience we hosted this workshop with a lot of enthusiasm. But we soon realised that Panambur children were not like Attavara participants. Nothing would work with the Panambur children. When asked to draw they would all come up with cup and saucer, hibiscus flower and Indian flag - all they had learnt in their drawing classes in school! The Attavara children had surprised us with a variety of drawings. They played with colours and enjoyed colouring their faces in the name of make-up. Sometimes, they would mix so many colours that the total effect would be just black.

Again, they would draw anything they saw around

them. A girl had drawn just a long line and beside it a small dot. What could it be, we tried to fathom. We struggled but finally gave up. We asked her to explain her drawing. The long line, she said, was her father and the dot was “me”! The hitherto meaningless picture suddenly became so meaningful. We had a peep into the feeling inside her.

Another boy had daubed some black paint and had superimposed a yellow stroke on that. Again we were foxed. What could it be? Anything abstract? We scratched our heads till the boy solved the mystery. “It is an autorickshaw,” he said and lo, we could see an autorickshaw now! Yet another artistic puzzled awaited us. A child had filled a white sheet with just colour dots and there was nothing else. Asked to explain the child said “It is bootharadhane”. He had only seen miniature lights from far in this festival and had successfully depicted it.

With these experiences of the slum children in the background we thought the officers' children would do something more interesting. But, our hopes had been belied. All that would emerge from this urban group was cup and saucers, hibiscus flowers and symmetrical designs.

The drama workshop was a big disappointment. We had shown a short film on neighbours and hoped for a debate. It was failure. When asked to display some acting talent they would come up on stage and repeat the clichéd line from Sholay - “Kithnegoli bakihaire Shambha!” or other filmy dialogues. We were clueless as to how to take this forward. The Attavara children would come up with all sorts of scenes they had seen in their surroundings - tiger dance during Dasara, Bootharadhane in the summer, the funeral



(they lived near a cemetery)..... They never ran out of ideas and were ever ready with something original, and something new!

To cut the long story short we were not able to produce a good drama in spite of all our effort at Panambur. We somehow managed and ended the workshop with a note of disappointment. It made us think. Where did we go wrong? But hours of discussion took us nowhere. This failure haunted me and I started discussing it with the experts. Was it something to do with their life styles? I started interacting with these kids and gradually I collected details of their day to day living. I found that the life of the officers' children was very well organised with a lot of space for their all-round development. But the poor Attavara children were unorganised and their parents had not lined up plans for their development.

Here is a juxtapose of the life styles of the two groups of children:

Morning:

Panambur: The officer's children are woken up in the morning and after ablutions they do homework and study, watched by either of the parents. After breakfast they are dropped at the school in a two-wheeler or a car by one of their parents just as the bell rings.

Attavara: They get up and rush to fetch milk from a nearby booth. There they meet their school/class mates who have come for the same errand. They chat and reach home late to be scolded by their parents. Then, they eat something and start for the school. They leave home early and leisurely walk to the school enjoying every moment on the way. They play as they walk, collect interesting things, climbing trees etc. They know of the different fruits they get at different season in different places and compounds! It will be eventful walk daily for them and reach the school late, almost daily. They are pulled up for late coming but, as children say, they are used to it.

Afternoon:

Panambur: The officer's children get their food from home. Either the maid or mother brings it or the father takes the child home and after lunch drops back.

Attavara: It is time to play. Food is secondary. They gulp whatever they have brought as fast as possible and run to play. They play to their heart's content.

Evening:

Panambur: Vehicle will be ready to take the children back home. They are asked to wash, fresh up and read. Some have regular tuition classes in math or science. They are allowed to play for an hour. Back home they have a wash and are at the desk for homework.

Attavar: It is playtime. Mothers seek their help to go to shop or fetch water, wood or kerosene. Just before dinner a majority of these children read and complete their homework.

Weekends:

Panambur: Majority of the officer's children are engaged in some extracurricular activities like dance or singing. Officers' children don't like their parents visiting friends or relatives houses because there will be no activity for them there.

Attavar: Their weekends are absolutely free with some exceptions. The Attavar children, when they visit relative's house with their parents, go out and play.

Looking closely at the two set of children, one could see a lot of difference in their lifestyles. From the discussion with the children, it was evident that the Attavara children were much happier. The officers' children felt they were being constantly watched by the parents. I tried to understand the phenomena. Slowly I understood their perception of freedom and control. The officers' children felt that their entire life



was being designed and controlled by their parents. The Attavara children experienced freedom and they had a space of their own.

Having “no space” or “having the space of their own” anything to do with the child’s creativity? How is it that the children of a semi-slum area with all their other limitations participate so actively and engage creatively in any situation? Do children need a world of their own where they can freely engage themselves with whatever they want to do? How is that the various opportunities provided by the officers for their children to grow are not yielding the desired results? Why do these opportunities provided with love and care ultimately irritate the children? Does “planned by the parents” itself limit the way the child sees these opportunities? Is this “space of their own” such a crucial thing in the creativity of a child?

I have stayed with these questions for long. But, they have given me some insights into what it means to say child-centric. It gives me some directions on what it is to be child friendly. Now, there is enough evidence to say that child learns best when it learns by itself; when it explores, experiments and from experience builds its own knowledge and from that the learning. But, this is the trickiest part for an adult who wants to be with the child. You have to be with the child as if you are not there. You have to design something for the child’s learning but the child should not feel that it is ‘your designs’ and the crux of this issue is you cannot fake with children! The million dollar question is do we want to give our children the space of their own? Without providing this minimum requirement how can we expect them to be creative, be original, be themselves?



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Rudresh

On the makeshift stage were six students of class 4 and 5 of a government primary school in a remote village called Thirtha, in Surpur taluk of Yadgir district. They were in the age group of 10 to 12 years. They were performing a five-minute role play on ‘Gram Panchayat’¹ and had been given just 15 minutes to prepare on a serious subject.

When the play ended the 40 strong audience cheered them profusely. Because the boys had played the role well, although the subject was a bit profound for that age. The theme, structure and the dialogues were very good. The children had stressed on burning local issues like drinking water and basic sanitation. It was presented with all seriousness and the children performed with confidence. In just five minutes they communicated very clearly that the Gram Panchayat had failed in discharging its duties. The role play was part of a creativity workshop.

A similar creativity workshop was being conducted at Timmapur village for children who were irregular to school. A boy had kept away from this workshop but would often peep inside the classroom where children were engaged in painting, drawing, singing, dancing. The next day he walked in and introduced himself to the coordinator, Iliyas, and said he too wanted to join the workshop. He was Daud, a 6th class student. He was let in and he participated actively for two days. That changed him and he became a regular in the school.

There are many such positive outcomes from the creativity workshops organised since 2008 by Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI)², Surpur. The idea was to engage the CSFI team with children in a meaningful activity and understand the way they learn, the way they behave and, more importantly,

to understand and learn the way the Margadarshis – CSFI team members- need to behave with them. Another objective was to acquire the experience of creating a non-threatening and fearless environment in schools and create space for creativity and self-learning.

These workshops convinced us that we can engage with children without creating fear or threat of punishment in their minds and this environment can be very productive and enjoyable. It also disproved the ‘spare the rod - spoil the child’ theory.

As already mentioned, the thrust of our workshops is to create an atmosphere of freedom for children, and awareness in them not to waste and not to hurt others. The workshop starts with painting. First, it is playing with colours. We ask children to play with colours individually and in groups. In this exercise they learn many things- mixing of colours, what new colours one gets while mixing them, what creates different shade and it ends in making of greeting cards which they take home with pride. Children enjoy the make-up on their face.

In the singing session they first sing songs from their text books and then school songs. Later they sing other songs known to them. Towards the end they try to compose songs and sing them. The dancing sessions are high energy sessions. After some painting, singing and dancing it is time for stories. Storytelling and story writing make them think. At this point we introduce mask making and later we move towards drama. We have different theatre games for children to introduce a character, establish a character, and change the status of a character. Theatre games are a hit with the children. They enjoy improvisations. We do not plan for any final product. We exhibit the



workshop process products on the last day during the concluding session.

These workshops gave us rich experience. The art forms helped us a lot in engaging children joyfully and at their own pace. We had a diverse group of students in the 9 to 12 age group – some were bright, a few average and branded as slow learners, irregular students and even a few out of school students. Initially it was difficult to get them into the workshop and engage them. And their number swelled and we would end up having more than 40 children on the third day.

Pointing at a student wearing the lion's mask and shouting 'I am the king of forest, every one listen to me', Mr. Tayappa, a teacher, said: "Students who would not utter a single word in the class have performed here with a lot of confidence and pride. See how they are manipulating the puppets with sharp dialogues at the end of third day". Shy children were found either wearing masks or dancing or played puppets to avoid facing the audience. This shy group had come out of its shell and performed excellently. But a few were back in the shell after puppet show.

We ensured that all the students participated and made available a lot of material which was kept openly so that they could use it freely. They were to be treated with love and affection and no one was to hurt or scold them. This applied to both the Margadarshis³ and the teachers. We encouraged the peer group activities and helping one other. Role plays on local themes were prepared spontaneously and presented to the audience. Our Margadarshis would, in the process, work on building the children's vocabulary using language in different forms, and develop in them, problem-solving skills. They would strengthen the academic and social skills.

Art forms like drama, role play, story construction, storytelling and puppetry would help in building skills like thinking, inference, comprehension,

expression, logical conclusion, spontaneous enactments etc. Drawing, puppetry, mask preparation, clay work would build imagination, aesthetic sense, a sense of size, structure, texture, colour contrast along with boosting psychomotor skills. Working as groups, taking each other's help by understanding strengths and limitations would help in building human relation skills, peer learning customs, group spirits, team work, cooperation, emotions, sensitivity and communication required not only for school years but also throughout their life. Eventually this would help in developing language, exploration of ideas and skills, understanding of self and others.

The fear of failure is totally absent in these child friendly workshops which helps in breaking limitations, boundaries and the freedom to do whatever they want helps in enhancing their creativity and originality. Let me cite an example. In Yalagi village workshop participants were asked to prepare individual puppets after a puppet preparation demonstration. While many had painted white thread or waste paper black to make it look like hair, Reshma, a class 5 student, had cut her own hair and pasted on the head of the puppet. Her handkerchief had been used as the skirt! This was neither asked for nor expected but that was the extent of her involvement. Many had designed interesting hats on the puppets and masks.

Learning

Three years of experience in conducting children creativity workshops in Surpur have made us learn that:

- Design of the activities should be based on children's interest and pace to ensure their active participation.
- Different art forms help in engaging children who are not interested in academics.
- Varieties of activities are needed, as the span of interest of children is very less and their interests are diverse.
- Creativity blooms in a free atmosphere.



- Facilitators need to be skilled in breaking stereotype products that the children produce in the workshop
- It is important to involve teachers since they are the people who will carry this forward.
- Art forms give ample scope for the child to express, explore and experiment.

In schools, these art forms would be treated as entertainment tools in functions that are organised. Our attempts are to involve teachers in these workshops and motivate them to incorporate these art forms creatively in the classroom process. We are however aware that it is a great challenge.

These creativity workshops have boosted our confidence in creating a child-friendly atmosphere and we are able to communicate this to the teachers. We have found that when the teachers see and experience, they start believing!

Rigorous training

Children might enjoy a creativity workshop but conducting one was a challenging experience for us. First, we had to build our capacity to conduct a workshop and then take it to the children. We had to play

a dual role – of a facilitator and of a researcher – as we had to conduct the workshop and also observe the behavior of children and understand the group dynamics.

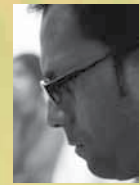
We planned a cascade training module with enough inbuilt scaffolding for our Margadarshis. An expert in the field conducted a creativity workshop for all Margadarshis and based on this workshop, a team of 8 Margadarshis conducted workshop for children. This gave us first-hand knowledge and understanding of the process with the children. Many activities worked, many others failed. We reviewed the workshop and planned with more inputs and our experience. From here the Margadarshis were paired and each pair conducted workshops for children. Then each Margadarshi conducted a workshop. By now, our Margadarshis had gained enough confidence to conduct the workshops and slowly they started involving teachers who helped in later stages to review the workshops. So far 250 workshops have been conducted in different schools of Surpur taluk. Our team is now able to design workshops based on the needs of the children and local context.

Footnotes

1. Gram Panchayat: Local self-governments at the village or small town level in India.
2. Child-Friendly School Initiative: The Child Friendly School initiative is a joint initiative of Azim Premji Foundation and Government of Karnataka. It is an experiment to demonstrate a process of providing quality education on a sustained basis, in a child friendly manner, to all children, in partnership with all stakeholders, by building capacity and accountability. The initiative covers all the government primary schools of Shorapur block in Yadgir district of North East Karnataka.
3. Margadarshi: Margadarshi is an associate at Azim Premji Foundation, who works closely with the schools and supports teachers in classroom process. Each Margadarshi supports 12 schools.

RUDRESH leads the Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) in Shorapur, Karnataka. He has a Masters degree in Social Work from Gulbarga University and has been with working with Azim Premji Foundation for the last nine years. He has been responsible for conceiving and implementing the activities of CFSI, as well as managing Government & community relationships. He can be contacted at rudresh@azimpremjifoundation.org

Learning on Stage



- **Abhishek Goswami**

A 24 day theatre workshop held in Jaipur for school children in the summer of 2012

Theatre workshop provides a platform where children can come out of their regimented academic pattern and explore various faculties for their holistic development.

Many believe that schools are not providing the right ambience for children to grow as free and independent thinkers. They instead encourage competition, social division and make children believe that one's success is someone's failure. This kills spontaneity and naturalness in children and makes way for development of a regimented mind.

To move away from this controlled system, many have tried to use innovative ways of schooling that can contribute to social integration among children which is essential for their natural growth.

One such innovative space for self-exploration is the theatre workshop which provides a platform where children can come out of their regimented academic pattern and explore various faculties for their holistic development.

Drama is a successful medium to explore life and relationship between self and surrounding. The process places the children and their developmental needs at the heart of its work, cutting across the social divisions and subjects.

The overall goal of the theatre process is to foster a positive self-concept in children of varied backgrounds by encouraging them to explore life by assuming roles and by acquiring acting skills. The imaginative exploration involves the setting up of a dramatic situation, acting out that situation, communicating within that situation and reflecting on the consequences. It also helps a person develop emotionally, physically, imaginatively, aesthetically and socially - by giving form and meaning to experience through 'acting out'.

It also fosters positive group interaction as children learn to accommodate with others in order to pursue shared goals. The entire process thus not only paves the way for self-development but also towards a process of socialization in order to develop the group as a whole.

In addition, growth in the drama and theatre space parallels the natural development of children. This growth is thus fostered in an atmosphere that is non-competitive, cooperative, supportive, joyful, but yet challenging. It can enrich their lives by their learning to respond to life's challenges in a humane and constructive way.

The Azim Premji State Institute for Learning and Development, Jaipur, organized a 24-day theatre and drama workshop for children belonging to the age group of 9 to 15 years, in May-June 2012.

The objective of this workshop was to enhance positive social relationships and coordination amongst children coming from different socio-economic backgrounds of the society through drama, theatre activities and allied arts.

During the entire tenure of the workshop, the children were to be sensitized towards self, family, education system and the society they live in.

The workshop culminated on 17th June 2012 in very informal way. Parents of the children participating in the workshop witnessed four short plays developed, rehearsed and enacted by the children themselves. Children chose four different folk stories as the main theme of these short-plays. An Exhibition was also put up, on the last day, of exploratory writing and drawings made by the children during the workshop. Below is a summary of the essence of the workshop through a set of pictures and a list of takeaways for children attending this process-oriented drama and theatre workshop:

- Positive and realistic self-image.
- Self discipline and self-confidence.
- Ability to concentrate
- Extension of physical and vocal capabilities
- Imaginative and creative ways of solving problems
- Ability to express and control emotions.
- Sharper observations of people, situations and the environment.
- Ability to recall and use sensory information.
- Ability to make considered decisions, act upon them and accept the results.
- Sense of responsibility and commitment individually and to the group.
- Initiate better, organise and present a certain task.
- Develop a sense of inquiry and commitment to learn.
- Ability to contribute effectively and constructively to the group process.
- Extend understanding of, acceptance of and empathy for others.
- Respect for others-their feelings, ideas, abilities and differences.
- Abilities to offer, accept and reflect upon constructive criticism.

Drama process images

Children rehearsing for enacting a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society through Games



1 2 Theatre exercises

3 4 5 Improvisations

6 Sharing of ideas

7 8 Drawing and painting

9 10 Parents' participation in a summer workshop and joint reflection on drama process by children and parents.

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Sumanth Sampath

All forms of art are important for children to experience, yet a finished clay piece adds a special value for the children

Though several schools across India have adopted an art curriculum, the art programme is relegated to the realm of extracurricular with little or no understanding on how this affects the overall development of a child. Education needs to be holistic and art programmes are an integral part of achieving the goal of holistic growth and development of children.

As an artist and ceramic teacher I can say that few art mediums facilitate growth and skills in children in the way that clay does. At our pottery studio, where I have taught children for several years, I have witnessed how invaluable the experience of working with clay is for sensory development, motor skills, self esteem, and self expression, problem solving skills, discipline, and pride.

There is no better moment for me than witnessing a child's joy as the kids sit at the potter's wheel for the first time and place their wet hands on slowly spinning clay. As they experience the texture and feel of

the clay, the students express what they are sensing with uninhibited enthusiasm: "It's cold, it's wet and mushy, and it's so heavy!" Clay asks to be poked, pinched, twisted and rolled and as they handle it, children develop both fine and major motor skills and realise that they have an effect on the clay, as it responds to their manipulation. Children visually inspect the clay's surface and colour, they smell it and are amused by the sounds it makes when it's wet. For many, it's perhaps the first time they've been encouraged to get wet and dirty in a classroom environment and there is an instinctive and uplifting response to the freedom they feel. Even when the finished product is ready to take home, the children hold and cradle their work, smoothing their fingers over the now fired surface as they turn it around and around for inspection.

Clay is a unique art medium because it is highly responsive to touch and very forgiving. As soon as children are given clay, they immediately begin to mould and shape it. They become aware that they are in charge and have an influence over the medium as it is quick to respond to their fingers. The feeling that they are in command of the clay gives the students the confidence to attempt any project which opens the door to greater self expression and imagination. Clay also allows a child to learn to repair mistakes and, therefore, not be afraid to make them. Making mistakes is essential for self improvement but can be difficult and even an obstacle for some children. The forgiving quality of clay and, therefore, the ability





to readily fix mistakes gives the child a sense of control over their project's success which improves self esteem and self expression as they realise that mistakes are not going to stop their progress. For example, during a class, a child had been working on his project - a toothbrush holder that looked like a ball player, for over two hours. All of a sudden he accidentally poked a hole right through the side of the article while decorating. He looked up at us devastated. But as I showed him how to take a piece of clay and fill in the damaged area, he suddenly took the clay from my hand and stated, "I can do it myself!" He repaired his piece and went on decorating it with fervor.

Clay is different from other art mediums in that it requires an understanding of the three dimensional world. In our programmes, we often encourage children to work on elevated turntables or to get up from their seats and walk to the other side of the table so they can see their creation from all sides. They begin to understand shape, form and perspective, and therefore get an insight into geometry. The children learn to really look and see the world around them and discover their place in that world. They gain knowledge of planning methods and problem solving as they map out their three dimensional project. Children need only encouragement to think on their own and a little help with the planning. For example, when we make a cylinder we start with a flat rectangular piece of slab clay which the students decorate and design as it lies on the table. As they are working we ask them how we could use this flat rectangle to make a standing vase. It's wonderful to see them understand how to roll it into a cylinder and we always have a few children who forecast the next step by saying, "We need a base!"

While there are rules and procedures that need to be followed when working with clay, children are very good about understanding guidelines and respecting procedures. Through this understanding they learn something that is very important: discipline yields

success. The methods we teach are simple: e.g. don't allow a piece of clay to be too thick, or a skinny tail should be connected to the body for support. I explain why the techniques are important (if the clay is too thick it won't dry properly or if the tail is too skinny and doesn't connect to the body it might snap because it is too weak) and the children grasp the concepts easily learning basic physics.

There are several after school pottery programmes and summer pottery camps being offered in various cities across India as well as at our studio in Bangalore. These two-hour programme sessions have various themes running across the various sessions. During these programmes, I've interacted with several parents who express a concern that their child might not be able to stay on task for that long, but the opposite is always true. Whether it is the sensory response to the clay, the ability to be in charge of the medium or, perhaps, the ability to express and articulate their emotions through their physical prodding or smoothing of the clay, all children, even those with high activity levels, become engaged and engrossed in their work. The children do not experience frustration or disappointment because the clay is flexible and compliant.

At Clay Station, we all teach ceramics with the philosophy that the process is more important than the product. I place emphasis on the discovery and joy of creating. However, children feel excited as they make their mug or pencil holder and announce that it's for their grandmother's coffee or for their dad's desk. The functional and durable nature of the finished stoneware clay gives children a feeling of significance and pride. All forms of art are important for children to experience, yet it does seem that the long-lasting nature of the children's finished clay piece adds a special value for them.

It is always fulfilling for me to introduce clay to children and watch its unique qualities contribute to their development in so many ways. Knowing



how valuable pottery is to children's achievements and because it is discouraging to see limits put on our children's school art programs, Clay Station has helped schools start pottery curriculum; worked with children with special needs, trained teachers to work with clay, assisted in purchasing and setting up equipment, and helped in planning and designing school studios. We encourage schools to start a pottery programme, no matter how small, as we strongly believe that it makes a greater significant impact on the holistic development of children than any after school programme. Towards this, we have shared the clay experience both in outreach programmes in schools and children's workshops within our studio with the belief that clay is an essential element for nurturing children's growth.



SUMANTH SAMPATH is a ceramic artist and director at Clay Station Art Studios Pvt. Ltd. He has taught and conducted workshops at several studios and schools in the U.S.A., Israel and India. Sumanth is part of a collective of enthusiastic artists at Clay Station, whose constant effort is to share the therapeutic and creative joys of clay with everyone. Sumanth can be contacted at sumanth@claystation.in



Vani Brahmachari

Often I face the question, “How come neither of your children chose science when both of you are scientists? How is it that, the choice of a non-science course, or art, visual communication and design as a career by your children did not make you blink even once?” For us, it was simply about the pursuit of creativity. In fact, in these career options, unlike scientific research, one can contribute something which many people relate to in their own life time.

Now if you ask me if this was a conscious decision by my son and his parents, my answer would be partially in the affirmative. For one, my child is dyslexic and had an interest to work with wood and wire. Creating jewellery using copper wires was one of his special skills. These endeavors also meant that we would have some experimentation that resulted in unexpected blackouts in our apartment when the power supply was normal in all the others!

The decision to take art as a subject was certainly made easy for all of us with our move to Delhi, where there was no “Do medical or engineering or die” situation as in Bangalore. The highest cut-offs for admission to undergraduate courses at Delhi University is for commerce every year and not for science subjects. A common perception is that art is spontaneous, (“Do you really need to train to be an artist?”) and hence it should only be an addition to one’s primary profession. At high school, when my son decided to choose art as a subject, the teacher was skeptical. She warned him that it was not easy and that she would watch him for a while before admitting him into the course. So there was no implication that art was a default option. Since she could see the natural inclination and his ability to do things differently (often

to avoid hard work), she was happy to give him the formal training. A wooden shelf decorated with porcelain chips that he made for his board project, adorns our living room even now! He continued with art as a career, further in its natural course, just as any other profession.

This brings me to the other challenge we face - to communicate the nature of his work. There is no problem in understanding if I were to say that my son is a software engineer; the concerned friend/relative would be satisfied to know which multinational he works for and would not worry about what software he creates! However if I were to say my son is in art and visual communication, the immediate conclusion is, “Oh, he is in advertising”. But I know it is very unfair on my part to leave it at that, because there is a deeper ethos that creative individuals have for their profession, which often doesn’t get the appreciation it deserves. Therefore, I engage in describing the work in a little more detail, but I am sure that I fail to describe it not only to his satisfaction but also to my own!

Most often, everyone appreciates that we were so unbiased and open-minded in allowing our son to choose “art” as a career, but I do get the feeling, at least in some circles, that they might not have dealt with it similarly if it came to their own wards; very similar to the much clichéd attitude of many men, appreciating the ‘smart ways and go-getter attitude’ of women other than their wives (the same attribute will be described as aggression in their wife/daughter-in-law!).

If you ask me whether I envy his profession, I cer-



tainly envied his course. The modular courses and the assessment criteria looked so much more fun than all that I had done in the course of my student life. On my part, the concerns I nursed when he started his career after a five-year diploma course in art, design and technology, was the issue of “job security”. Growing up in a family where my father and brothers had pensionable jobs and my husband and I having one ourselves, it appeared as a life with day-to-day uncertainty. I must mention that my husband was not particularly worried about this aspect. But with time, I realize that it is enriching in many ways and there are other ways to live than the path we have followed. I am acutely conscious that our own societal disposition, financial or otherwise, allows me to adopt this position.

This brings me to an important consideration that is the root of compulsions on the part of the family as well as the child not to choose art as a career. Sustained success in this career is not only linked to one’s own

talent and grit, but it also depends on opportunity, exposure and contact. In my experience at the University, in every batch of Master’s course students, there are one or two whose heart is not in Biomedical Sciences, but in wild life photography or painting and art. After a couple of weeks into a semester, I can see that a girl/boy is capable of much more than what she/he is putting into the course. When I probe further, the confession comes out something like this - “This is not a course I liked. I got admission in Wild life Institute of India at Dehradun. But my parents felt it has no scope.” Of course, the career options in India have expanded over the years, but the awareness about the courses themselves - and also the opportunities available after the course - needs much more publicity; not only for the growth of these institutions, but more importantly for parents and children, to feel secure and have the freedom to follow their own dreams, with confidence.



Vani Brahmachari is a professor at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Centre for Biomedical Research, at the University of Delhi. Her son, Sourav, had a stint with National Geographic and Fox History. Presently he works with Rajeev Sethi Scenographers and The Asian Heritage Foundation. Vani Brahmachari can be contacted at vani.brahmachari@gmail.com



ART IN EDUCATION

Art is something more than painting or drawing. It is a way of thinking, a way of seeing, a way of living. Art means arrangement and selection. Arrangement and selection mean design. Design means order which is more to be used and enjoyed, something to be lived. More precisely it is an essence of appreciation it is a question of right feeling and right values. It is an awareness and appreciation of things of beauty.

Education has been defined as an experience, rather reconstruction of experience or more precisely continuous reconstruction of experience in the light of new experiences. Art is a continuous experience which we get from life itself. Art in fact, pervades every sphere of our life. Without architectural design our cities would be reduced to log cabins.

No general educational programme is complete without a sound art activity, as it is one of the most important liberating factors unfolding the personality of the child keeping him towards better growth, intellectual, emotional and social.

A drawing made by a child is the result of his movement which is guided by the feeling and thinking of a child. The scribbles that a child makes in child's movements coordinated with his thinking and feeling which spring from his experience.

There are definite stages in a child's development:

Manipulative Stage : 2 – 3 years

Usually the child tells a story with scribbles. For example, he may say, "This is a flower, or a car," although neither a flower nor a car may sometimes be recognisable.



Gagan Bagga
Art teacher, Army School,
Ahmednagar

Experimental Stage : 4 - 5 years

In this stage his muscles become more obedient to his thinking. At this stage the child is able to balance and organize line and colour and attempt to draw human faces, especially of the immediate family

Clay modeling activities are important and satisfying to small children.

Schematic Stage : 6 - 8 years

At this stage children develop a particular formula or symbol that is temporarily satisfying for representing the human figure as well as other objects. Circular, triangular or rectangular shapes may be used for heads, bodies, hands, feet or features, curved and straight lines used singly or doubly may be used to represent arms and legs. At the beginning of six to eight year period the sky is usually indicated by a blue stripe at the top of the page, and slowly they do full colour in sky.

Some craft, such as cutting out printed patterns, making cards is also popular.

From nine to twelve stage :



Children become more bold and spontaneous. More drawings like depicting other children is attempted.

From twelve to fifteen stage :

Children are now mature and like to work independently in groups, experimenting with different materials.



From My Own Experience

1. Children love to work in groups. In Art we can experiment with colours and other material. Children who lack assurance can paint backgrounds and minor objects, while the complex and important forms will be executed by the children with more ability. In groups children use many different ideas and creativity.
2. Proceeding from simple to complex themes makes children more confident. .
3. Coloured films and slides on art subjects and process are both motivating and informative.
4. Playing music in class creates an atmosphere of creativity.
5. Seeing an artist's can be inspiring.
6. If a student is good in particular skill, the teacher should allow him to develop and display it.
7. There should be choice in medium as well as in the choice of subject matter. For example : a student who does not enjoy painting may be happily using clay.





Ini Periodi

Being part of a Yakshagana troupe made me understand the concept of teamwork at a very practical level. I learnt to cherish success, accept failure, and welcome feedback gracefully.

Getting ready to go for an all-night Yakshagana* performance is one of the fondest memories of my childhood. There was nothing like waiting for a Yakshagana performance those days. Everything was a celebration, from the anticipation to going, then watching the artistes get ready in the Chowki* absolutely stunned, and getting lost in the world of wonders. I would watch the entire performance; mesmerised, praying the night would never get over. I have even cried several times after the performance, unwilling to come back to reality that was so boring and plain in comparison.

Yakshagana as an art form has played different roles at different stages in my life. As a child it opened a new world to me, a world that consisted of colours, richness, characters and emotions. I would sit through the Ekalavya Prasanga* weeping and crying at the injustice of the world. I was probably one of the luckier children to have an atmosphere at home where I could discuss what I saw and what I felt. And these stories churned up questions within me, they made me think, wonder and ponder about various issues and aspects of life in whatever innocent way I could. Of course my mother was always there to answer my queries and trigger more questions. I would ask my mother very seriously “Amma, If Rama was good, how can he treat Shurpanaka so badly and send Seetha to the forest? What is the difference between Rama and Ravana then?” We would

talk about how it was impossible for any person to remain either good or bad. We would discuss then, what I now call, shades of personalities, or converse vaguely about human desires and conflicts, at its most basic level.

My mother was starting a cultural organisation in our village which was to conduct weekly Yakshagana classes. Here was an opportunity for me to be close to something that I had always watched from distance. After attending the first class, I never looked back. Thus began my new journey with Yakshagana.

Yakshagana played the most significant role in my life during my early years of adolescence. I was becoming less and less comfortable with my own body and appearance, even though I was in an environment where growing up wasn't looked at as something to be ashamed of. I was becoming more and more conscious physically. Yakshagana gave me a sense of freedom that I am extremely thankful about. My body as well as some aspects of my personality became free as I progressed in Yakshagana. I was able to stand straight, head up, no longer conscious of my body and my changing self. The basic posture of Yakshagana demanded confidence, freeness, and self-assuredness; if one wanted to really learn the art form, one had to let go of all the other bodily constraints. It's almost ironic that an art form that is considered solely patriarchal (even today, it's rare to see



women performing this art form) should have such an impact on us, girls. I personally found the experience of learning it liberating and I'm sure many girls who were learning it with me felt the same.

A strong performer in our group plays the role of a demon. And women were thought to be incapable of doing justice to these roles because the costume itself was extremely heavy to carry. We can't help smiling even today when the whole audience gasped in surprise at hearing a woman's voice, after an elaborate introductory dance. "Oh gosh, that's a woman!" was what they all would say. On the other hand it was hard to watch so many talented artistes discontinuing simply because they were girls. Their families would force them to drop out, making us feel extremely depressed. It is difficult to find the perfect combination of talent, hard work and interest – like every other art form.

If watching was mesmerising, performing was almost hypnotic. Getting ready for the performance, the practice, putting on the elaborate make up or heavy costume, getting on to the stage, letting ourselves get lost and finally the high or even the low you experience after the performance were all equally thrilling. I learnt to cherish success, accept failure, and welcome feedback gracefully.

Being part of a Yakshagana troupe made me understand the concept of teamwork at a very practical level. Like one of my most favourite Yakshagana artistes explained "If Krishna is to appear as a protector, Draupadi needs to relate with him in a particular way highlighting some qualities that will make him a protector." Where you stand on the stage, how you carry yourself in front of another character, how you dance, speak and the words you use... everything needs to be in synch with who you are on stage and who are you relating with. Nothing then is individual. You only become a small part of a larger picture that you along with everyone else are trying to present to the audience and this insight is what makes



us all humble.

My journey with Yakshagana hasn't always been smooth. The most challenging part was when I was required to speak or give a message that was against my values or when I was asked to be part of a story line I didn't respect. I have asked myself several times why I was part of a prasanga called Tulsi-Jalandar which spoke about a woman's virtues and chastity in a way that made every inch of my body uncomfortable. What was I to do at that point? Is it more necessary to be committed to the art form that you loved very much? Or, give up on it simply because some element of it contradicted your values and beliefs? Or did we have the freedom to stay within the framework of this art form and not include aspects that we were not happy with? These were some of the questions we faced as a team.

I called myself not religious or part of any caste. What was I doing then, acting out stories and sec-



tions of epics that were so important to a particular religion? I had to figure these answers for myself. Studying a paper, as part of my course called Perspectives in Arts, consolidated so many of these thoughts for me. It made me revisit these questions which were left only partly or vaguely answered. My teacher explained beautifully how a true artiste treats these stories as universal human emotions that everyone could connect with and attempts to make it accessible to everyone who's watching it.

There were other questions to deal with as well and we dwelled upon these questions together: sometime we were lucky enough to be able to think in the company of some scholars. Was there a need for a reformation of this art form when it came to children taking part in it? What kinds of stories would be appropriate for children to enjoy? Was it okay to experiment or was there a desperate need to stick by the rigid rules of this art form in order to preserve its beauty? None of these questions or doubts made me distance myself from the art form; in fact they only strengthened my bond with it.

There are some troupes which use this art form mainly to preach about their religious beliefs, culture and a way of living that they want to impose on people. It is unfortunate that many people associate this art form only with religion. There are some who

stay committed to the art form and make it their lives. I personally do not have big dreams or expectations from it; I hope to stay connected with it and continue to learn, think, grow and be part experiences that are so enchanting.

Yakshagana, probably like any other art form, has a great potential. It can contribute to both physical and psychological wellbeing of a person if you cultivate a healthy relationship with it. We as a team have tried to constantly exercise our relationship with it; through learning and attempting new things. We have developed a new prasanga called 'Madhura Manikya' introducing new gender perspectives in Yakshagana. It raises questions about gender discriminations and breaks stereotypes in the most unassuming manner. After working on this story for a whole week, under the guidance of some extremely renowned Yakshagana artistes, we performed this 'women oriented theme' in a temple in a small town near Mangalore with trepidations about audience reaction.

And when the audience stayed on till the end we knew that we were on the right path!

*Yakshagana : a vibrant folk art form of coastal Karnataka with dance, drama, music, elaborate costumes and make up, extempore dialogues and episodes from Ramayana and Mahabharatha.

Chowki: Green room of Yakshagana

Prasanga: Episodes or stories to be performed in Yakshagana

Ini Periodi graduated from Centre For Learning in 2011 after finishing her A-levels. She is currently pursuing B.A. in Communication Studies at Mount Carmel College, Bangalore. She likes to keep herself busy with a diverse set of interests - languages, local tradition and culture. She enjoys working with children, being close to nature and being constantly involved with the performing arts in some way or the other. She can be contacted at uvperiodi@gmail.com



**Karishma Ajmera &
Rahul Ajmera**

Children here are encouraged to think and come up with several different ideas to solve the same problem.

On my way to Ahmedabad, where I was studying at the National Institute of Design, a fellow traveller on the Ahimsa Express asked me why I had decided to study design. “Because I didn’t want to do engineering” was my brusque reply. And there ended our conversation.

Over the next few hours of the journey, I thought about what I had just said. Was that true? Was my career decision a result of an elimination exercise?

Eight of the eleven close friends of mine had enrolled into engineering colleges. The ninth studied medicine and the tenth joined the Army. What had made me choose design? Was it disinterest in engineering that spurred me? What kind of exposure had moulded my decision?

I went to a school that was very focused on academics. Children were segregated into class divisions A, B and C according to their academic performance, A being the toppers. There had definitely been no catalyst in school that helped me develop a creative bent. Or, at least not directly. Perhaps the music lessons nudged the right brain, but that was probably all. I settled on the reason that my mother’s enthusiasm and interest in the arts had rubbed off on me.

Now, in retrospect, after passing out from NID and being a parent to two children, one can observe shortcomings in the system; the first being career guidance in the creative field. Most parents and teachers know very little about careers that jog the right brain, be it architecture, design, film making

or even composing music. They are unaware of the existence of colleges and design schools that nurture these talents. Having been to a design school, I personally know of a large chunk of students who had no idea about the field of design before they got there. Several of my peers had ended up at NID by a matter of chance.

Another factor that is lacking in schools is the provision of inputs that boost creativity. Here, creativity is not to be confused with making things beautiful, it is in fact, a way of thinking.

Creative thinking is associated with the capacity to look critically at reality, explore unconventional alternatives, and perceive situations from innovative perspectives (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) Creative thinking embraces cognitive processes related to innovative problem solving.

There were not many classes at school that made me feel the need to be creative, whether it was solving an arithmetic problem or a chemical equation. Perhaps what came remotely close were the art and craft classes where we tried to cut paper and make beautiful artifacts, but they never really culminated in innovative problem solving.

We do not have immediate solutions for these shortcomings, although the first part seems easier to tackle. Children could be better guided and counseled, they could be exposed to an array of career choices that hone their creative inclinations. Maybe such counseling could highlight that today’s suc-



Successful designers, architects and artists can enjoy lifestyles on par with engineers and doctors. Students and parents must be cured of traditional dismissiveness or uneasiness towards creative fields, which are often seen as full of strugglers and dreamers.

The second part, about introduction to creativity in schools, can be encouraged in two ways. One could have a separate lesson, focused on creative problem solving. Or another way could be through the course subject itself. Teachers could see if there is a way to introduce an element of design thinking within their subject. For example, let's consider a subject like Civics. The way I was taught Civics was simple; I had to rote memorise the laws and acts that were put into place during India's independence. What we were not exposed to, was the context or the circumstance under which those laws came about. What we were not taught, was that each law was the outcome of a problem-solving activity, whether the problem was immediate or distant.

What if the children were put in the shoes of the policy makers? How would they have tackled the same problem? Could they look at the issue from another perspective? Therefore, how different would their law be; and how would that law have, over the years, impacted the Indian society? A classroom activity such as this would help children to explore unconventional alternatives and make them feel empowered because they found innovative solutions to real world problems.

Having identified these gaps in the system, my partner Rahul and I are doing an experiment to bridge them.

We have conducted workshops in Design Thinking for children in the 8-12 age group. The aim of these workshops is twofold; they target these exact two gaps. The workshops begin with acquainting children with the field of design and making them aware of the different disciplines of design practiced across the world. Once they are sufficiently excited and enthused about the field of design, we make them feel like they can do it themselves.

The workshops lay emphasis on thinking, rather than making or drawing. Children are encouraged to think and come up with many ideas to solve the same problem. For instance, a simple exercise of designing a table encourages them to look at the stability of the table in different ways. Once they refine their ideas, they are taught to represent them, not necessarily through making or drawing the solution. The children are given a broad framework within which they can channelise their creative thought. They are provided with a context to solve their problems; a list of criteria and functions that their design must meet.

Although we carry limited experience of conducting these workshops, it is very clear to us from the results, that the children are ready. They are able to grasp these concepts and think out of the box. While we still continue to experiment with different formats and styles of conducting these workshops, this is still a drop in the ocean. If this is taken up at a systemic level and a conscious effort is made to weave in design thinking into the school curriculum, creative problem solving would not only prepare children for any career they may choose, but would also be a critical life skill.

KARISHMA and RAHUL, are both graduates of Industrial Design, from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. With a professional experience of 8 years, Karishma has worked as a Product and Retail designer at Titan Industries. Rahul's professional experience spans over 10 years, where a large part of his career was built at Human Factors International. Currently, they run a company called Twist Open Innovations in Bangalore, which delivers expertise in various areas of design and innovation. Twist Open draws on Karishma and Rahul's rich and diverse experience as a springboard for its aim to be an exponent of Design Thinking and Design Processes. They routinely collaborate with organisations interested in expanding the application of design besides the areas in which it is traditionally utilised, education being a core interest area. They can be contacted at karishma@twistopen.in and rahul@twistopen.in



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Street Theatre as Art that Educates

Uttara Bharath Kumar

in conversation with Learning Curve

While putting this issue together, we felt that all forms of art that educate must be considered. Street theatre has an immediacy and appeal that is at once universal and profoundly participatory. It follows, then, that its message is powerful enough to change behaviour.

To look at street theatre as a tool for furthering understanding and reinforcing change, Prema Raghunath spoke to Uttara Bharath Kumar, Founding Trustee of Nalamdana, in a free-wheeling chat about street theatre, how Nalamdana uses it and how it can be used in schools. The following article gives some excerpts from the interview, but before we go on to the actual conversation, here is a brief overview, taken from their own writings, of Nalamdana:

Nalamdana was conceived and founded in 1993 by Uttara Bharath Kumar, a then-recent graduate of Wellesley College, a few local enthusiasts and three idealistic young graduates from a local university. Fueled by their enthusiasm and a seed grant from the Echoing Green Foundation (www.echoinggreen.org), the organization took root.

Nalamdana's ethos is to deliver better health through entertainment-education. They believe that people need more than just knowledge. They need creative persuasion to motivate and empower them to better, healthier and safer behaviours.

Nalamdana's target audiences are vulnerable (children), low literacy (rural and slum audiences where over half are functionally not functionally literate), and often marginalized (women). To reach them our communications must be relevant, reflect their lives,

be emotionally appealing and not condescending, and yet entertaining.

Nalamdana's strategic communication skills are relevant to any health or social issue. Topics tackled to-date include HIV and AIDS, family planning, adolescent, maternal and child health, tuberculosis, hypertension, diabetes and heart disease, conflict management, child abuse, gender violence, alcoholism, adolescent life skills.

Learning Curve (LC): Before we go on to what Nalamdana actually does, we'd like to know why street theatre was chosen as a medium of transmission of your message.

Uttara Bharat Kumar (UBK): Since we address a diverse audience of both literate and semi-literate people, the visual faculty seemed to be the most effective to appeal to. We could engage with them in interactive sessions and there were immediate opportunities to react.

LC: What kind of messages did you want to talk about?

UBK: We wanted a vehicle for health and health-related issues. We were not going to talk about religious or commercial issues.

We were also thinking of a several-level approach. We wanted the link between society's health issues (and the people who are affected by them) and the help that is available (but not known to everyone). One major issue was accessing information, then feeling a personal connection to the issue and then and making informed decisions. We were sometimes



the first to bring certain issues out into the open and give a community a common story and language to discuss it.

LC: Would you call street theater an art form? How?

UBK: It is an art form because in order to be effective, it has to be beautifully done. Also, creating a well-balanced story is an art in itself, because it can't be preachy or just entertainment. We have to have a lead-up before we get right to the point. The community has to be enticed to gather a crowd, there have to be lights, music, sets and props for them to take us seriously.. We have to compete with the latest soap showing on the TV screen at the time.

Then there is the aesthetic of costumes. Our audiences are sophisticated in terms of what they look for in entertainment because TV has placed everything within their reach. When we make the huge effort we do, there is a feeling of being respected.

As for the language we use, it is simple We include local expressions and some slang and accent peculiarities to be credible but are careful not to deliberately speak badly! The point is to be understood as widely as possible.

Finally, the effect we make: behaviour change means statistics. There has to be a takeaway of an intention to practice different behaviour, after considering the outcomes.

LC: Is there audience participation?

UBK: Very much so. There are interactions the next day when we might be challenged. There is also discussion on the characters of the play they watched.

LC: Why was this method (street theatre) chosen?

UBK: It fell in with the concept of scripting ideas entertainingly. I remember the first play we did- we had expected a very small number, but more than a thousand turned up!

LC: So there is a script?

UBK: There could be some ad-libbing, but there is music and a definite plan we follow.

We use role-play. Sections of students act and there is huge interaction. We deal with child abuse, health and hygiene issues. We make use of the top-to-toe approach. There are five flip charts that have been converted into booklets – the concerns being thinking about the future, personal safety, hygiene, reproductive health. We also provide a kit which contains the booklets, flipcharts and a DVD. These can then be developed into discussions.

LC: How do you decide on your themes?

UBK: Some were born of the FAQs in our school programmes. Then, there are key questions asked at our focus group meetings. These are meetings we convene with just the children without their teachers in order to make the responses as honest as possible. Nalamdana out sources the information gathering to experts and the content is pre-tested with a sample from the intended audience.

LC: How and where do you think the street theatre format can be used by teachers in schools?

UBK: I think it can be used very successfully wherever a different behaviour is required. For example, it can be used successfully on issues relating to values, for instance respecting the family, or bullying. Moral judgments can be another area where this format can be employed – encouraging open-minded thinking and tolerance of people who are different from oneself. There is a general lack of credible sources of information and theatre can open avenues. This kind of drama brings things out into the public space where discussion is made possible.

Misconceptions can be erased and detrimental behaviour addressed.



Children can be asked to write stories, create plays, bring issues to the forefront. However, an expert is always required to address these groups. One great advantage is that the language of the issue is learnt so that conversation is fostered.

A story can be the starting point of whatever has to be addressed. I would suggest that any of these contain only two or three points and there must be a definite plan of action, of understanding. For example- if you understand this, this is what you must do next. Thus, barriers and challenges are addressed. The counter arguments can lead to tackling new ground.

So, I'd say that (in schools) the street theatre model can be used as a medium for behavioural, health and attitudinal changes.

Where it fills a niche is the factual approach (it adopts). Of course, more thoughtful, deeper approach won't happen overnight. It does model a certain positive behaviour, gives things a positive spin, without making it sound too easy. Important change often begins with a seed of an idea being planted and a discussion begun.



Uttara Bharath Kumar, a native of Chennai, India, has a BA in English with a minor in Economics (1993) from Wellesley College in Massachusetts, USA and then a Master's in Public Health Science, MHS (1997) from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, USA. She has over 17 years of experience in International Public Health and has worked for the last 12 years for the Johns Hopkins University in various countries in Africa, India, and the United States.

In 1993 she founded a health communication NGO in Chennai called Nalamdana (Are You Well?) that still reaches the under-served/ low literate populations of Tamil Nadu State with critical health information and social mobilization messages through creative media (drama, TV and radio).



Sudeshna Sinha

As Shikshamitra happened in 2005, art started happening around it. Shikshamitra was an alternative school/learning centre for 8-16 year old boys and girls from a slum community. Experiments in learning processes, class durations, contents, forms and modes of evaluations highlighted its span of existence from April 2005 to January 2011.

Among other subjects, drawing, painting, various crafts, viewing art shows and films, listening to and trying music, theatre and dance happened every day in some form or the other. These artistic activities took between one and a half to two hours of the total learning time (6 hours) in a day – the same as Math or English.

Art, and all that it encompassed, simply became a way of living for us as it took root in the lives of both children and teachers. Art was not merely a ‘class’ or an ‘extra-curricular’, it was everywhere: on walls, on doors, on our notebooks, on paper and on cloth, it even entered most of the exams. If drawing, singing and theatre were parts of English and Art classes, they were parts of Geography and Math classes as well.



Group collage inspired by Picasso's Guernica



“Drawing, clay work, sewing, theatre, singing, dancing are essential to studying because there are many who do not like to and cannot just read.” - Anita

The art that resulted was not just on paper with coloured pens. Here, cloth and clay were constant companions and paintbrushes, glue and scissors were ready at hand for the kids to take as needed. We consciously tried to implement the practice of re-use. Aside from paints, new materials were rarely bought. Used papers, thongas (envelopes made of newsprint), discarded paper boxes, old clothing were all recreated and re-used for drawing, painting, displays and stitching projects.

Borrowing ideas from school, the teachers started to create their own cards, wrapping paper, bags and envelopes out of old greeting cards, cloth, newspaper, magazines and of course, colour. Everyday objects at home got a touch of colour and an ‘arty look’. Aesthetics was touching people’s lives and recycling came more naturally to many.



Door painted by Bikey



The Art Teachers

The very first art teacher in Shikshamitra sowed the spirit of originality, recycling, and clean up after art. Atreyee could fleet through stories as well as arts and craft, while helping children to pick up the basic skills of drawing at the same time. She would encourage every individual style, inculcate that there was no “right” or “wrong” in art, ask children to keep drawing or colouring beyond the limits of a single sheet of paper (she simply had the child add on

another sheet, if the child had to continue her line of thought). Her task was difficult – to get the students out of their habit of copying from books and draw completely on their own. Sharing colours, restricting drawing to two colours, or even painting by mixing the leftover colours challenged children to appreciate and make the best of available resources.

Atreyee left within a year. Shortly after Shikshamitra started, Maura had joined. She came in once a week to do spoken English with the students. She brought a lot of energy, movement, songs, colours, books, figurines and drawings – all for the sake of speaking English. The first year in Shikshamitra, however, witnessed rowdiness, destruction, defiance and an unsettling discomfort among the students. Maura kept returning home from Shikshamitra thinking she wouldn’t come back the next week, but she returned every time to this mad school. The children often giggled more than they spoke, using Maura’s class as time for some fun. While they did learn some English, they didn’t use it very often. It came out spontaneously in bits and pieces when Maura did some colouring or a fun worksheet.



Invitation card for an exhibition at Shikshamitra was made of recycled materials and original artwork

Was there a message in this for us?

After a year, when Atreyee had left, Maura took up as the art teacher. Technically, she wasn’t an art teacher. A creative teacher who is sensitive to children’s responses, doodles, writing, emotions, craft and art, Maura focused on her art classes using the same energy, her love for movement, fun, colour and



Painting of a kettle with leftover colors; Painting with two colors and encouraging every individual style; Learning English with lots of dancing and song

books – her whole self. The focus was art, and this meant finding the artist within each child and helping her or him to realize that.

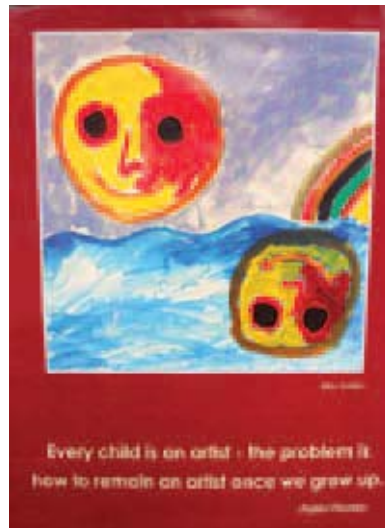
What evaded us in the previous year suddenly became clear. Children concentrated and settled in the art class (though it really took two years), listening well for the first time to what Maura was trying to say. The more they listened, the more they talked.

They had to speak up to ask for colours or help, or if they wanted to express an idea. *English was now happening more in our art classes.* Soon, the spoken English class that Maura had been taking lost its meaning and was discontinued.

Maura’s art classes embraced Life; the lessons connected the children to themselves, to the world around them and to the languages (English and Bengali); most importantly, they crossed the limits of the classroom. The classes extended into visits to art galleries (exhibitions of K. G. Subramanyam, contemporary artists or even Gond Art of Madhya Pradesh), streets, parks, a local potter’s kiln and Maura’s own garden. They were thankfully more than art classes: students were exposed to a range of possible art media, including oil pastels, the various types of paints, papers, ‘found’ objects (like feathers, wrappers, stamps, etc), brushes, clay, needle and thread, baking, music, and more. She also invited many artists and artisans. The classes touched upon the fundamentals of recycling, conservation, symbiosis, and also the connectivity of art and life.

Learn and Earn Project emerged out of a two-month long theme-teaching

session on cloth at Shikshamitra. We strove to find new products that showcased the individuality of our students on bags, diary covers, bookmarks, coasters, jewelry. Mixing art and needlework on cloth, saleable items were designed, produced and finished – reaching a point of perfection. There was quality control, too. Children learned to price an item, pack, display, sell and deliver products while also keeping track of the sales money at fairs or exhibitions inside and outside Shikshamitra. At the same time, they were saving money in their student accounts.



Poster designed by Shikshamitra



Selling Shikshamitra products;



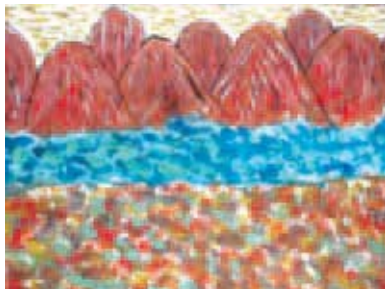
Sketching on the street; Observing and taking notes at the K.G. Subramanyan exhibition; Pencil sketching and water colors in Maura’s garden



Comparing hairstyles of two students; EVS metamorphosis of a cockroach



Each piece a one-off work of art



Rohit's try at Van Gogh style



Series of Raj's drawing progress

“Find your own style – don't copy”

Shikshamitra tried to lay its foundation on the above words. Every child was encouraged to find her/his own style whether it was in language, EVS or art. One could be inspired by Van Gogh or Picasso, the style of an author, an interesting worksheet or even the way a teacher narrated a story. Students would learn to see and think differently, and then become

inspired to come up with their own original idea or thought.

Raj Naskar had stayed out of school by choice. He joined Shikshamitra in search of novelty and to “learn something,” as he put it. Raj loved to draw but he insisted on copying from books, calendars or advertisements. No requests, coaxing, or explanations could change him. One afternoon, Raj came to me holding a picture copied from an English primer. “It looks fine,” I nodded. “Since you insist on copying, why don't you copy that tree outside?”

He sat and drew the tree. He drew as much as he could see within the window frame. “I cannot see more than that,” he said, “if I look outside there is more to that tree. I will draw as much as the frame permits,” Raj declared. I nodded. Next, I saw him sitting at my door drawing my profile as I worked at the table. That afternoon he added originality to his drawing by “copying.” He was copying real life. Since then, he tried to draw his own pieces, and there was less and less copying.

Sk. Samrat, like Raj, refused to stop copying. Orphaned at the age of 5, Samrat defied instructions. He would rather tear up his “copied drawing” than make one on his own when the art teacher insisted. The art teacher insisted, and kept losing her temper. The insistent art teacher left. Maura came in with fresh energy, breathing life into art. Children were creating their own designs using colour, thread, sequins. Samrat was found to be busy embroidering along his own drawing – an original

piece drawn for the sake of that embroidery. And then - he did lose his urge to copy. He found a new passion for creating his own drawing embroidery designs, murals on the walls, and even started illustrating his own story.

We began to notice that each child had a tendency to draw the same thing over and over again, not unlike the kind of studies a professional artist might create. We encouraged many of them to make a small drawing book by stapling old A4 sheets of paper together so the backs could be used. Chaitali made flowers, Mohan drew colourful faces, Rohit did cats, Babai painted mountains, and Ador made swirly “wave” designs... Over and over in new colours and designs.

We have painted our classroom walls, what about painting other people’s walls?

Just before school let out for the summer one year - in order to clean up the school a bit - we partitioned parts of the wall along the corridor (with pencil lines) and asked each child to sit on the floor and do a painting. By this time, the children felt comfortable with the different kinds of paints and paintbrushes. They were always encouraged to paint from their hearts - after making some plan in their minds - and their art was never done using pencils, scales or erasers.

It was a crazy idea. I approached Maura and the students to come over to my house. Would they like to

paint my walls? But why? Wouldn’t it be a bit risky? I had my own list of reasons why:

- The walls would look pretty and different.
- Instead of hanging framed pictures, murals by children would look much better.
- The space around the switchboards gets dirty. Paintings around these would cover the dirt and prevent further mess.
- It will also be a trial run for the students to paint someone’s walls according to her wishes and not theirs. It would be like delivering an order.
- For a change, the art class would happen at someone’s house.
- The work would be paid for in kinds. There would be hot lunch for all and a donation to buy colours.

The students poured into my house, armed with paintbrushes, beaming confidently. I explained what I wanted and showed them the specific walls, where I wanted the work done.

Maura made rectangles in pencil on the dining space wall. 12 such rectangular spaces accommodated 9 students. 3 students were absent but they would come over later, sometime, and fill in their reserved spaces. They stood in rows with palettes of colours staring hard at their wall space. No pencil used, they started painting right away into their wall bit. Maura and I kept exchanging worried glances. The inmates of my house shuddered, fearing the spoiled outcomes.



Embroidered painting by Sk. Samrat



Beautifying a dirty switchboard



Getting started on the wall



Little did they know what surprises awaited them. Meanwhile, girls had grouped in pairs and had started painting around the switchboards. As they finished, they added a few dabs here and there, and a border to make it look prominent. My bedroom wall had been taken over by a team of 5 and two more artists beautified the switchboards. Sajahan was one student who always stood out by his presence, his involvement with Shikshamitra and was a natural leader. He just stood there and observed. Soon he singled out a prominent wall space (not considered part of the artable walls by me) and started dabbing brown paint onto the clean, white wall. Having shocked the skeptical onlookers, gradually a tiger emerged in a marshy setting (interestingly, this boy comes from Sunderbans).

The painting spell lasted for about three hours, ending in a simple lunch and a lot of singing and dancing. Looking at the walls, a natural dialogue and critique took place. The children were assessing their own work. At the end, some observant students noticed that a few areas had become quite dark because of too much colour mixing or dirtied paints, etc. We asked

some of the children who understood the concept of ‘fixing up’ to put the finishing touches on certain areas, straightening out lines around a light switch by mixing a similar colour, adding a bright colour over a dark patch where a younger boy lost control of his mixing abilities, cleaning up a splotch or two that wasn’t meant to be there. All cleaned up the rooms, washed and packed the art materials.

And what emerged?

We knew that here was a group of confident, young artists who could manage space and do up people’s walls. They had the ideas in their heads and could express them in paint without prior pencil work. We felt that some of the students could be grouped together for the best results in future. They could form a team and take up ‘wall orders’ and finish it beautifully – from start to finish.

Much later, these students - in a team with or without Maura - went over to other schools and organizations to teach students and teachers there how to paint up their walls. Quite a few government schools in rural West Bengal now have a rich, colourful façade created by their teachers and students. Shelters for railway platform children can boast of beautiful interiors done up by the children themselves – motivated by the children of Shikshamitra.



A spotted tiger emerged out of the brown squiggles



A colourful wall by young artists nearly done



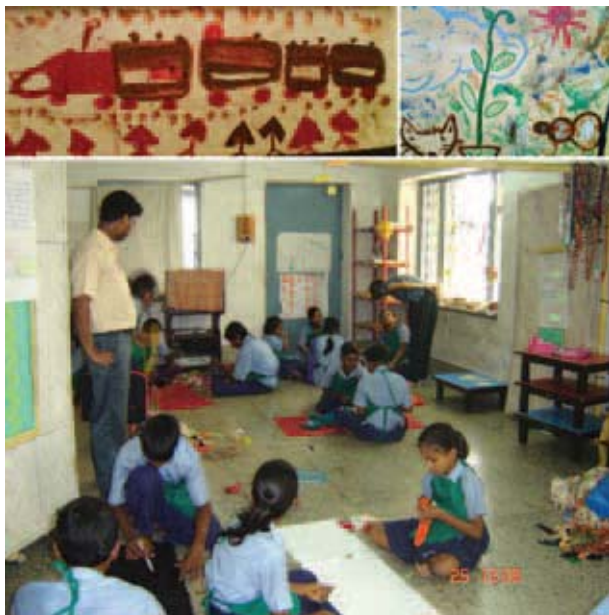
Wall mural done by children of shelter at Kharagpur platform

Art with responsibility

Painting or drawing does not only mean sitting still and using colours, the proverbial “sit and draw.” It is saving up colours and not wasting. Painting and drawing mean looking after the art materials: colours, brushes, glue, paper, scissors, and cloth – they all need care and they want a room of their own. They want to return to their own spaces, like we return home. That’s why in art class we recycle just the right size boxes to fit each of the various art supplies. Later, we don’t have to search for them. We can easily share them. And what is most important, we don’t have to wait for our teachers to give them out. We can all help ourselves.

I asked one student, Rohit, to list out how we do things differently at our school. Here’s what he came up with:

- We used to draw in a drawing book, now we use the back of used paper for our pictures.
- Paper that is used on both sides is made into recycled envelopes we use around school.



Two wall murals done by children of shelter at Kharagpur platform; Art classes always encouraged students to share materials

- We cover our books with newsprint and then decorate them.
- Once we have finished painting, we mix up all the leftover paint and create new colours to experiment with.
- We store paper scraps, bottles, corks, plastic packets, buttons, wood, pencil shavings, etc. All of these are sure to be useful later on.
- We keep our belongings in an old paper box after decorating it up a bit.
- We put used tea leaves in our flower pots.
- We create decorations out of scrap for Saraswati Puja.
- We try to use plastic as little as possible – but we don’t manage to do it properly all the time.

The art shelf

When we rearranged the library/resource room to fit more items we had to get rid of a shelf that had been on the wall. The shelf made its way into the main room where the children did their art classes most of the time. We took one art class to have the kids go out and find small boxes that would fit like a puzzle onto the shelves and house the various supplies we wanted them to have access to: scissors, string, tape, colour pencils, sketch pens, one-sided reusable paper, newspapers, paintbrushes, erasers, drawing pencils, sewing supplies, etc. We consistently asked the children to use things and return them to their boxes so that other people could use the same items. For clean up, we’d line the boxes up, fill them with things strewn about the workspace and then pop them back on the shelves. Of course, it didn’t always work and kids were putting things in the wrong places and then there were no scissors or all the glue was completely finished, or... but the children were learning the concept that things could be shared more efficiently if we took care to return them to their proper places, and if we maintained them well.



“Clean-up is equally important as the art project”

After each class, Maura would spread newspaper and the children would wash their brushes and water vessels well, bring them back and place them in a certain way in order to let them dry. We encouraged the girls NOT to help the boys with their clean up, a natural instinct. Everyone was to clean up their own area and then look around and help out with other jobs like sweeping and scrubbing paint from the floor. All paintbrushes had to be placed with the brush end facing one way and when these were dry the teacher would put them away with brush end up for the next class. The kids learned the hard way first, ruining a lot of brushes by putting them away wet with brush side down. All the water vessels were dried on the newsprint facing down and put away later so that the box they are kept in wouldn't become wet. Now all the kids at Shikshamitra use this method and we see Sajahan teaching his little students in the community library project.

So what did we learn?

Organically, we were doing and saying things around art that closely coincided with the art experts and pedagogues. The children did not read the experts, nor did we consciously go through them prior to our art classes.

But, when asked to tell their views on art one of our students, Dolly, wrote:

“I believe children want to draw more than adults do. When children cannot express in words, they say all that by drawing. Drawing means colours. There is colour in every man, animal and bird. We can express anything through colour, but adults don't agree with that. When a child grows up, she starts listening to others and does what others do, so she decides not to draw anymore. She loses her identity.”

And the quote by Herbert Read in *Art: The Basis of Education* by Devi Prasad, says:

“A child's art, therefore, is its passport to freedom, to the full fruition of all its gifts and talents, to its true and stable happiness in adult life. Art leads the child out of itself. It may begin as a lonely, individual activity, as the self-absorbed scribbling of a baby on a piece of paper. But the child scribbles in order to communicate its inner world to a sympathetic spectator, the parent from whom it expects a sympathetic response.”

Art in Shikshamitra grew as we watched the children grow up. Many outsiders thought it was an art school; it was in fact a school where we all learned art and its manifestations organically. We nearly always began with only a loose idea for the art class but soon the mood of the class, or the spirit of the day, lent its hue. A language class in the morning could influence a whole day in Shikshamitra. Interesting observations gave us new ideas and we always remained flexible enough to try them out right away. We let children illustrate their own stories, personal history booklets, or even math sheets and book reviews because it was clear that art helped them find their identities and be themselves.



The school had to be wound up in 2011 for various reasons, finance being an important one. But the spirit of art that developed in Shikshamitra spread to different schools, centres, individual teachers and trainers.

It visibly continues through our students and different outreach programs that we continue to offer.



A photo album of Shikshmitra's art classes can be seen at:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tik-tiki/sets/72157601353116588/>

SUDESHNA SINHA has been working in the field of innovative alternative education for the past 17 years. Since 2005, Sudeshna has been the founder-member and coordinator of Shikshamitra, an alternative school for 9 -16 years old first generation school goers. Currently Shikshamitra is an Innovative Learning-cum-Resource and Training Centre, which she continues to head. Trained as a special educator from the University of Mumbai, she has worked in special and formal schools as a special teacher for several years. She was instrumental in setting up and running an innovative Hindi medium school, Aashirvad, for the migrant slum and street children in Central Kolkata. Sudeshna has intervened as an educator and advisor in organizations that work with hard-to-reach children and those with mental health issues for children and adults. Her special interests are in Language, Creativity and Motivation of children, teachers and parents. She can be contacted at shikshamitra.kolkata@gmail.com

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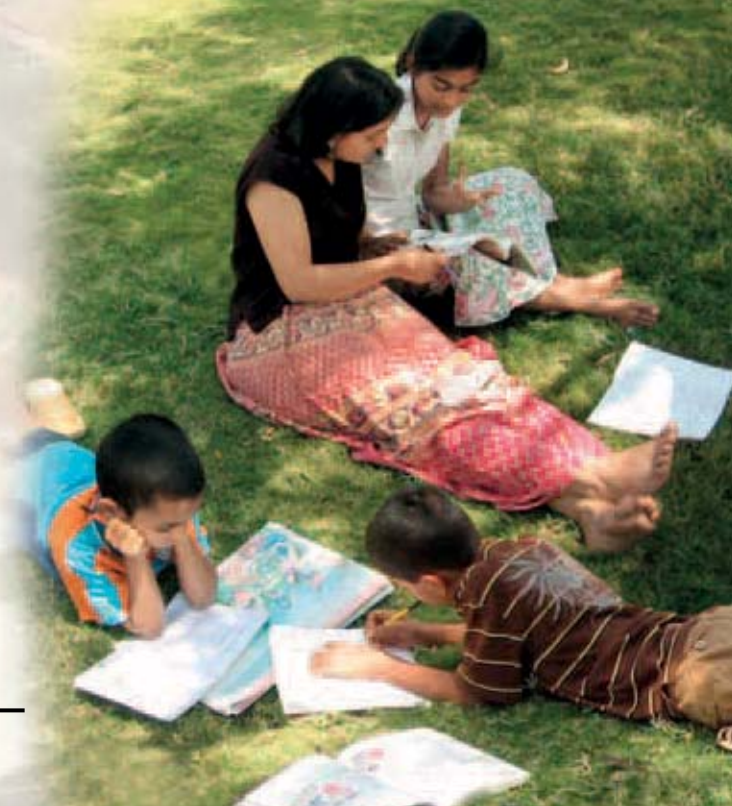
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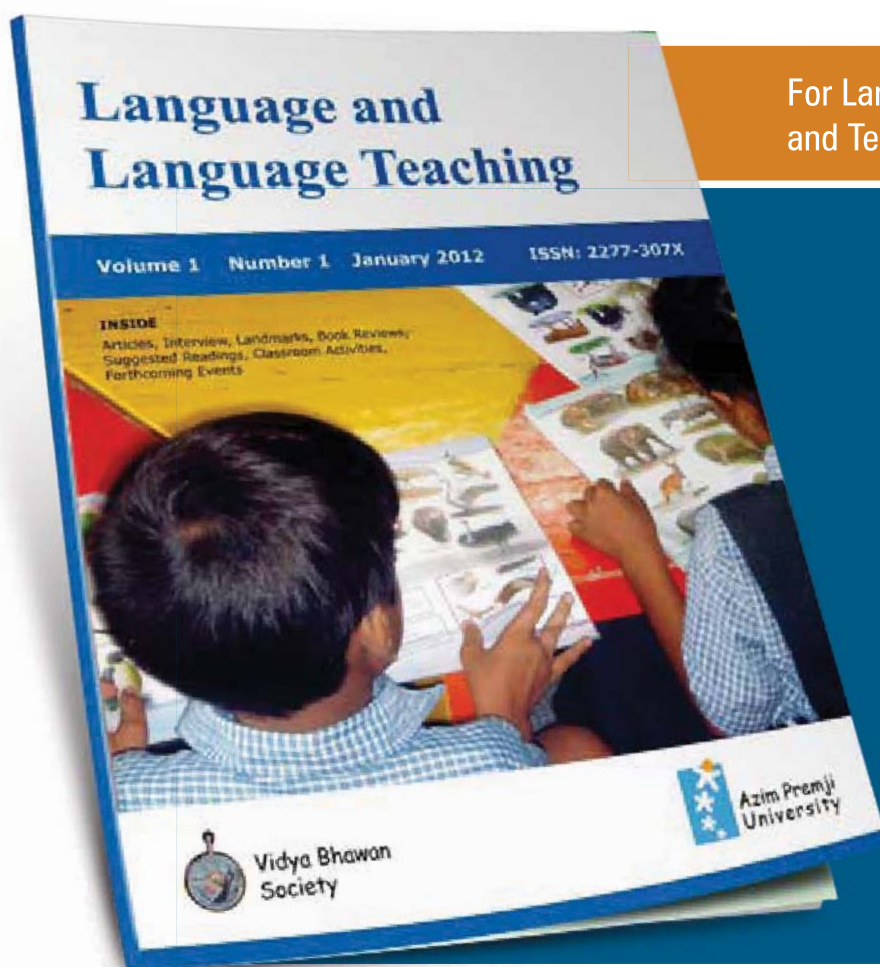
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