



Art Education in the National Curriculum Framework

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The current focus on art education is not new – every education policy in our country has emphasised its importance. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 had categorically stated that art education must be a compulsory subject for all schools till Grade 10. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 has taken a critical step further by explicitly articulating what ‘compulsory’ implies—all students must demonstrate basic knowledge and capacities in at least one art form to pass their Grade 10 board examination. In addition to this, the NCF-SE 2023 has placed art education on par with all other curricular areas, such as science and mathematics. To ensure clarity of what is expected, it has provided Learning Standards in the form of curricular goals and explicit competencies for the four art forms — Visual Arts, Music, Dance and Movement, and Theatre for every stage of school education.

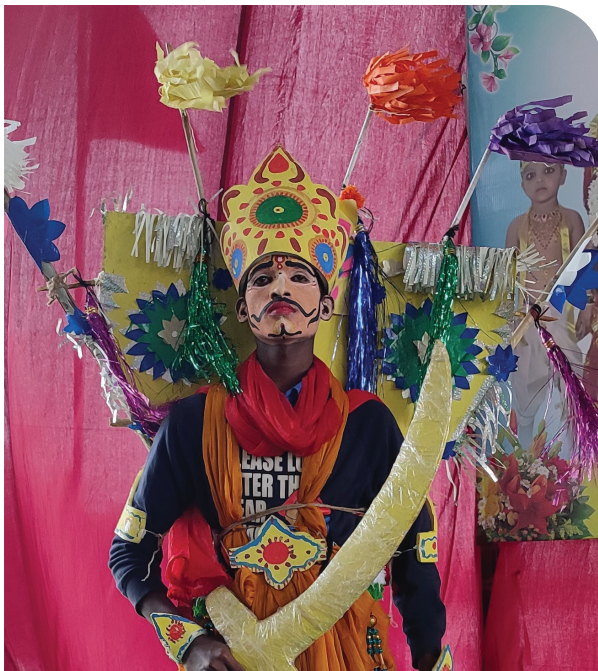
Approach to art education

Art and design practices are an integral part of most cultures and exist in our everyday routines. While some of our art traditions are struggling to survive, we still have several examples of culture

that are commonly practiced—rangolis and other forms of wall and floor art; storytelling, songs, rhythms and dances performed both informally and formally; basketry, pottery, jewellery, textiles and so on. Even the arrangements of vegetables, fruits and flowers in the local markets are visually interesting and follow aesthetic principles, as do other examples of everyday architecture and design—signboards, hoardings, product design, interior design, advertising, new media design and so on.

However, even after so many education policies and revisions, the place of art education in the school curriculum has not gained value or importance. While the mandate of the NCF-SE 2023 is clear, there are several challenges related to implementing art education immediately. For instance, schools may lack basic resources for art education. To overcome this, the NCF has provided ‘Nested Learning Standards’—a basic set of Learning Standards which schools with limited resources can also achieve, nested within the entire set of Learning Standards that NCF-SE 2023 aims for.

This ensures that all schools implement the arts in at least a basic capacity using the help of local



artists, and other easily available resources. Over the next few years, all schools should ideally aim to get the required teachers and resources so that they can transition to the entire set of Learning Standards.

Choice and flexibility are particularly important, given that there are cultural variations and diversity even among different regions of each State. Art education must be contextualised, particularly in the early grades. There is concern from the perspective of the board examination—the worry that one needs to ‘follow syllabus’ and have common content for students to pass. However, assessment in the arts is largely based on competencies and not limited to content. For example, in the performing arts, students must develop competencies in music such as the ability to discern different notes, octaves, pitch and variations in volume, rhythm and tempo. At the same time, flexibility and choice could be exercised by teachers choosing songs that are age-appropriate and align with the curricular principles. All schools need not learn the same song/dance/drama and variety in themes and topics must be encouraged. Similarly, it is important for students to pay attention to how visual artworks incorporate line, shape/form, colour, texture and space, while creating artwork on any topic that is relevant to the students’ life



and local culture. In dance and theatre too, they would pay attention to body postures, gestures, movement, and speech, while working on plays and performances that they choose.

Thus, the underlying principle for providing choice and flexibility is that the same competencies can be developed through a range of content. This approach enables students to practice the fundamentals of any art form that the school chooses, while also embracing the existing knowledge of the arts through experts from the local communities.

Principles informing the development of art education textbooks

Having a ‘textbook’ for the arts seems contradictory to the spirit of the subject, especially in a country as large and diverse as India. Textbooks of other curricular subjects have unfortunately set a wrong precedent of being the only source of knowledge that students are tested on. The textbooks for art education need to be viewed and used as resources that guide teachers who may or may not be familiar with the arts, in both content and pedagogy.

It is a matter of grave concern that many students do not get adequate exposure to the diversity of India’s cultural heritage. While everyone seems

to know and make 'Warli paintings', very few can name a Warli artist, or talk about their everyday life, beliefs, customs as well as their music and dance traditions. The manner of teaching art in schools has focused purely on the artefact as the product that is to be 'judged'. As a result of this pressure to produce/perform, advanced techniques are introduced prematurely to young children, which goes against child development and educational aims.

The textbooks published by NCERT are guided by the principles mentioned in the NCF-SE 2023. So far, textbooks from Grade 3 to Grade 9, covering four art forms—Visual Arts, Music, Dance and Movement, and Theatre have been published. They focus on the three important processes for arts learning:

1. **Making processes**, which involve hands-on engagement with materials, body, instruments, collaborative skills, experimentation and expression while working creatively in any art form.
2. **Thinking processes**, which relate to ideation, visualisation, language and communication, decision-making, planning, organisation, etc.
3. **Appreciation processes**, which are related to viewing a wide range of arts practices and learning to respond constructively—making connections with your own experience, developing multiple perspectives, empathy, emotional regulation, critical thinking, and so on.

The textbooks provide specific pedagogic guidelines for each art form and encourage teachers to use alternative resources and modify the activities in the chapters to suit their local cultural contexts. They provide sufficient opportunities to explore local arts and cultural traditions, which aligns with NCF-SE 2023 recommendations for having choice and flexibility, particularly in the initial stage of implementation.

The textbooks for art education introduce art fundamentals in interesting and engaging ways, while also giving students room to explore their own interests and expressions through a

wide range of activities and resources across four art forms—Visual Arts, Theatre, Music, and Dance and Movement. If a student were to learn art education for eight consecutive years through these books, they would get a breadth of exposure to the culture and art practices from every region of the country. It would instill confidence in their own creative capacities and a deeper understanding of what it means to be Indian.

Critical areas for capacity building

In schools, there is little or no space given for cultural literacy and regular participation in creative activities for aesthetic and functional purposes—these aren't even considered as 'education'. The general understanding of art is limited to drawing and painting, sometimes extending to sculpture; and crafts are wrongly given a lower status. The arts are largely taught for recreational purposes, for helping students cope with academic stress or at the most, as pedagogic tools to aid conceptual understanding in other subjects. Aesthetic development in terms of arts knowledge and critical appreciation is rarely addressed in art classrooms. Thus, implementation of art education is contingent on capacity building of key stakeholders – SCERT and DIET faculty, school heads and teachers.

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Teachers are the biggest strength of our education system. They hold optimism, believe in bringing change, and find solutions to myriad challenges within the school system. However, most art teachers in our country are trained as artists and are not familiar with education perspectives or learning theories. They place a lot of emphasis on 'arts training' that conforms to fairly dated academic conventions and techniques, e.g.,



making a realistic portrait/landscape, singing or playing an instrument skilfully, acting a specific role, and demonstrating dance moves that are perfectly copied from another source. School competitions further perpetuate this approach. Students do not have sufficient opportunities to challenge conventions, explore, experiment, create from their own imagination, and express their personal ideas and emotions; nor are they allowed to embrace imperfections. They are rarely encouraged to respond to artworks or performances of others through constructive discussions.

The belief that art education is an essential part of our life and learning and it can be implemented with limited resources must be inculcated during capacity building.

Developing sound teacher education programmes that prepare art teachers must be a priority amongst policy makers. Art teachers (of Visual Arts, Music, Dance and Theatre) would



require exclusive orientation and training in both content knowledge and pedagogy in their respective art forms, as well as the interconnections with other art forms.

Schools do not schedule art periods frequently, because they prioritise language, mathematics, science and social science. When students get less time for the arts, where they actively connect with themselves cognitively, emotionally and socially, they are deprived of essential cultural and creative experiences; and also hampers a healthy progression in their aesthetic and socio-emotional development till they complete their school education. Therefore, timetables must be planned as per the time allocation for different subjects in the NCF-SE 2023.

Conclusion

As States move towards implementation of art education, they must inculcate among stakeholders the belief that art education is an essential part of our life and learning and it can be implemented with limited resources.

Given the mandate of the NCF-SE 2023, art education must include exposure to both visual arts and performing arts through the processes of making artwork, thinking about the artistic

ideas and learning to appreciate the arts.

Finally, the NCF-SE 2023 emphasises variety and variations as a pedagogic principle, which

implies that arts education should encourage every child to explore the arts through multiple modes and expressions.



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