

Art-Integrated Lessons to Facilitate Self-Expression

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When we begin our journey of healing from the effects of the pandemic, we must proceed by caring for everyone around us. This is an opportunity to alter our numerous not-so-good habits and ways of life by paying more attention to hygiene and conservation of the natural environment. Our strategy for educating and learning should be to create a safe and welcoming environment in schools to make children feel comfortable.

It has been over one year since schools closed down and most children have forgotten whatever they had learned in school. It is time to re-build their reading and writing skills but only after assessing that they are emotionally ready. Today, teachers and the entire education system are confused as to how to plan lessons and where to pick up from; how to gauge the past learning of children.

Learning through art activities

It is essential for children to have a joyful learning experience and it is equally important to ensure that all children follow the safety protocols required to take care of themselves and others within the school premises. Along with this, teachers have to keep reminding them in subtle ways to openly express how they are feeling during this time. Here are some thoughts on what teachers can do:

- Focus on attitudes of care and respect towards every child.
- Ensure a fear-free environment within the school for children to share and express their feelings.
- Plan group activities that help children mingle with one another while following COVID-19 precautions.
- Invite local resource persons and parents of children to introduce their local traditions, folk tales and songs.
- Plan activities that promote creativity in children, such as integrating art into lesson plans for all classes and across subjects.
- Promote creation of artwork by using local resources and waste materials with the help of parents and siblings.

First day of school

At the Azim Premji School, Kalaburagi, on the first day of school reopening, we are planning to conduct some art activities like painting, clay modelling, and playing games so that all the children can enjoy their return to school. This would motivate new children to get familiar with our school culture and promote greater peer interaction. We will be organising a display of artwork where children speak about their creations, share their poems and songs, compose their own tunes, explore the sounds of different musical instruments using kitchen utensils, plastic bottles and natural materials; as well as play some physical games that will rejuvenate them. Every effort will be made to enhance interest in learning different concepts across disciplines.

During the pandemic, we faced many challenges in carrying the teaching-learning materials (TLMs) individually to the different learning spaces in the community; and we had trouble with internet connectivity while sharing videos and listening to songs online with the children. There was a lack of space in community classes that limited our reach to more children. Due to restrictions on gathering in groups, our plans of inviting local artists and resource persons and introducing local art forms to the children were also put on hold. Most importantly, we could not pay attention to the learning outcomes of each child individually.

But even with all these challenges, children loved art exercises that were assigned in the community classes. Through this, they discovered many things on their own and developed self-confidence in their creative capacities. We plan to continue similar exercises after school reopens.

At present, we hope that schools reopen soon and we can return to regular operations. Many of the difficulties that we have been facing in teaching children will cease to exist when we return to classes in the school premises. We can teach more effectively when we interact in person with every child. We will be able to introduce physical activities and art forms in which group participation

and peer-learning are crucial. Most importantly, we will be able to ensure regular nutrition that directly impacts children’s learning and overall growth.

Our experience with activities

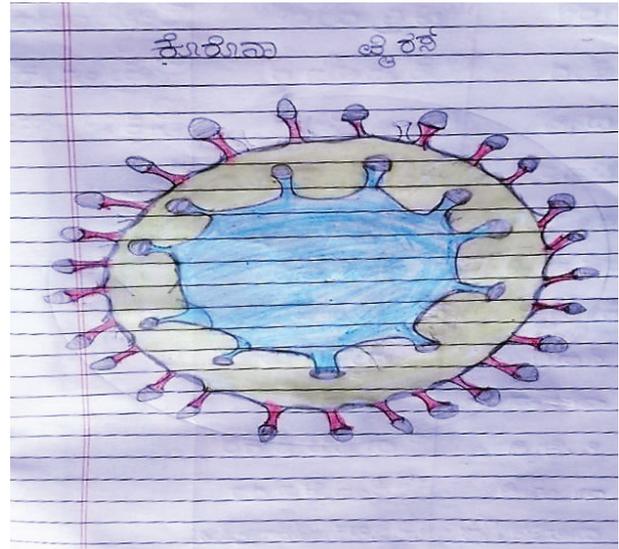
I am sharing some activities that we involved children with during the COVID-related shutdown of schools. When we initially began some exercises to support children with talking and expressing their feelings, it was the art activities and music that prompted the maximum response from them. We also included some fun activities just so that the children could learn with joy.

For children to first learn about cleanliness and safety precautions during the pandemic, we taught them these songs: ‘Baayi baayi corona ninu hogale bekide’ in Kannada and ‘Wash, wash, wash your hands, wash your hands together’ in English. We taught these songs while using a sanitiser and demonstrating the best way to rub hands together. Initially, when the children were hesitant to sing, we, teachers sang along with actions and body movements. When we all stood up and moved our bodies and sang the tune, the children loved it. We gradually introduced the English letters and meanings of words, like *mask*, *sanitiser*, *virus*, *social-distance*, *lockdown*, *unlock*, and *seal-down* etc. Children began to sing the song when they used the sanitiser and slowly got familiar with the meaning of these words and began to use these in regular conversations. A few children also wrote their own songs in Kannada, sang these in their own tunes and uploaded them on *YouTube*.

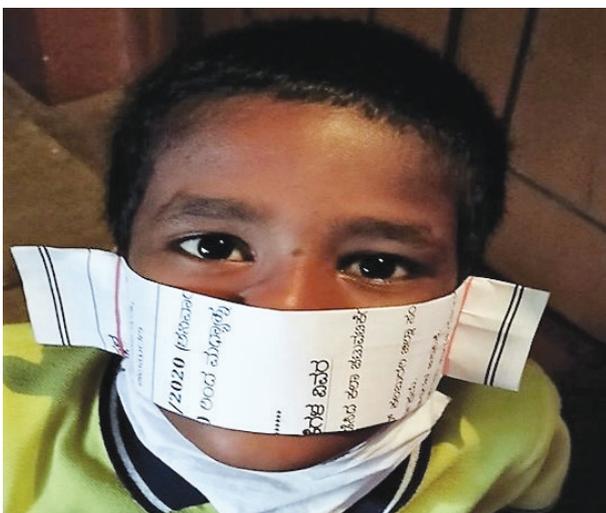
Children were particularly delighted when we taught them how to make masks using wastepaper. After learning to make masks, they gave these to their siblings and parents too.

Children made drawings of the coronavirus based

on information that was available and, also how they imagined it in their own minds. They also spoke about their creations.



Some children made *dandiya* sticks and would dance to the rhythm of the *dandiya*. The aim was to introduce folk songs to help children open up. A few of the children were hesitant to share their feelings, so we asked them to make a diary in which they could write down their thoughts and feelings freely. Children made diaries in many shapes (circle,



square, rectangle and even irregular, as shown in the picture) and wrote in them in English and drew emojis that reflected their feelings.

Children hand-printed each other's palms on paper, an activity that helped them interact with their peers so that gradually they felt more ready to talk and communicate. They also enjoyed clay modelling and making necklaces out of unused objects, like shells and beads. Children learned

practical skills like sewing. They sewed their names on cloth. They also enjoyed painting teacups in which they sowed seeds and watched plants grow, watering them regularly and recording the growth each day. They made boards for games like *Ludo*, *Snakes and Ladders* and chess to play at home. This helped them to learn shapes, lines and numbers from 1-100.



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