



Importance of Art Education for Teachers

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ABSTRACT: In this diversified world that we are now living in, the role of the classroom teacher has enlarged from that of being a placid knowledge giver to one who is both knowledge giver as well as knowledge planner for individual pupils. In this role, the classroom is not a placid repository for soaking up what the teacher, as the principal authority in the situation, gives out to the pupils, but is also the individual who introduces to the pupils in her charge the abilities of critical thinking, communication with the world beyond, collaborations all around, and of course, discovers for her pupils the joy of creativity, born of the three previous skill components.

Keywords: Art, India, Education, Skill, Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that a teacher who uses the methodology of today, to shape her pupils for facing the world of tomorrow, is doing her pupils more harm than good. Though the teacher's role all through history has been that of a resource provider to her pupils, the issue has become even more acute in the present context as the avenues of learning for the pupil of today are widespread and the teacher in the classroom must be aware of this phenomena in order to fulfil her role effectively. Thus it would do well for the present-day teacher to keep in mind the saying by Rabindranath Tagore: 'If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.'

However, the above statement does not lead to the conclusion that we must bring about drastic changes in the teaching methodology in order to suit the needs of the present time. Ever since the previous century, when education took on a universal character and school curriculum everywhere became oriented towards preparing students to become useful citizens, the priorities of the teaching community have been under constant scrutiny. Early in this learning system, teachers were pressurised to deal with the core subjects, while engaging with students in the classroom. Thus the periods given to art education were gradually edged away from the class time table. This does not imply that art, per se, had lost its importance altogether, but that art was not considered useful enough to occupy a period of the time-table in the teaching system after the

Post-War years. The general idea prevalent at that time was that one needed to teach children to become bread earners by learning a skill, or better still, go in for higher education and specialise as scientists, engineers and so one. The value of education was oriented towards utilitarian goals and thus art making, one felt, was a very personal development, to be pursued only by the talented few who were good at drawing, or singing, or dancing, or any of the other artistic pursuits (Social Change in Contemporary India).

DISCUSSIONS AND OUTCOMES

This does not imply that art was devalued in society. On the contrary, the serious art learner was encouraged to continue with his interest, but not at the cost of his pressing core subjects which were dictated to suit a more utilitarian lifestyle. Thus the classroom teacher began to feel that art education was the responsibility of the art teacher, and just as she, the art teacher did not interfere with the class teacher's area of responsibility, the class teacher in turn, was not expected to spill over her responsibilities into art education. Thus Art continued to be valued as a speciality, offered to talented students in the school, who were clever at drawing, performing or other creative skills and no reference was made to them in the regular curriculum, as they were side tracked into 'extra-curricular' activities. Speciality teachers were appointed for teaching these pursuits and promotion or other considerations of students did not take into consideration their interest or otherwise, in art making.

This state of affairs reached its lowest point in the late fifties era, when the Sputnik was launched in 1957. For every child of that age, it was space travel that was the star attraction and in the class room teachers took pride in sharing their knowledge and excitement about space travel with their pupils. Maths teachers would set problems referring to distances in space, while the teachers of English would ask pupils to write imaginary essays based on topics such as, 'If I was space traveller' (Jadhav, 2020).

In the new orientation on the methodology of teaching that should be pursued by the classroom teacher, the concept of teaching in regular classes through the medium of the Arts was not be welcomed by most regular teachers, who preferred to explain concepts by simply following a cut and dry presentation method, as if they were discussing the symptoms of a sick person before a group of medical students. This was especially noticeable once children reached the middle school level and the pressure of completing regular lessons and preparing for exams, as also learning a subject according to the laid down course, occupied most of the time for the regular classroom teacher. Thus the concept of including art instruction alongside regular learning seemed an unnecessary burden on the child. School education was geared to produce professionals who would contribute to the technical advancement of human society and not well educated gentlemen and ladies who could talk intelligently, when in a social or political gathering.

One of the earliest studies that looked into the idea of whether a rigid compartmentalisation of Art Education as a subject that should be divorced from the general stream of instruction given in a regular classroom, came about in 1970, at the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, in America. A parallel of the changes in the mindset that was brought into focus then has been mirrored once again in India through the latest NEP Policy, wherein the integration of teaching at all levels with an arts background has been specifically mentioned. What these education policies in America and in India have stressed upon, is the fact that even when the youngest pupils are being instructed, there is a need to inform and integrate education with complementary disciplines such as art history, aesthetics, and art criticism.

The DBAE (discipline based arts education) theory of education, as it came to be termed was a thumping success as it produced the desired result as it not only invigorated the ambit of art education per se, but also made teaching more exciting and relevant for the classroom teacher. This theory proposed that art making (or "studio art") entailed a thrust of creative expression. This push or thrust needed to be extended and informed further by its application into the complementary disciplines of art history, aesthetics, and art criticism, even when teaching the youngest pupils.

Today, an overall assessment of the DBAE theory, has most observers agreeing that it has been instrumental in reinvigorating art education and gaining a place for art in school reform. As a case in point, this report cited that while teaching about the various civilisations of the world, the class teacher could explain the great skills that were required to make the great works of the past. Thus the child in the classroom would be veered away from the drudgery of simply mugging up dates of wars and conquests and would be led to explore and appreciate how the art of tool making, or perhaps the construction of ancient temples, or perhaps the art of writing and trading among nations was brought about, through the creative genius of our human ancestors.

The languages teacher was also given a further handle for making her class arresting for her charges by dwelling on the languages of art making in the past. Teachers were encouraged to point out to their charges that in every age, the craft and art makers followed instructions that were handed down from father to son, and which contained precise principles of how a statue should be made, or how a wall should be painted and more importantly, how the resources for art making were to be gathered from one's surroundings. This included observing the plants all around so that one could create the colours needed for painting an image with natural dyes. It also included the need for strict self-discipline while working so that the end product was made with due attention and the maker was filled with a sense of pride at a task well executed. Teachers were also made aware of the need for precise communication when giving instructions to pupils for the success of their projects, and this too, was part of the 'vidhi' recorded in the instruction manual which the teacher would place before the learner and develop in him the habit of carefully reading all instructions before attempting to tackle an examination question, or before solving a physics problem.

Coming to our own education policy, we find that the NEP of 2020 has been very explicit about teacher guidelines as far as integrating Art education in the general instruction is concerned. What this policy has hit upon is the fact that when teachers integrate their instruction in the classroom with artistic details, they are indirectly giving their pupils the tools for critical assessment, which is the very core of all learning methodologies. All learning is meant to encourage individual development and the ability to judge and understand what is taught, in a personal way and art integration into education is the best resource for such a step.

The individual teacher herself is also benefited by this method. Instead of applying the dry academic rules of how to instruct pupils, knowledge of the arts, helps the teacher innovate and reorganise her teaching methodology. This becomes a challenge posed to the

teacher, who automatically finds the responsibility of teaching pupils, particularly the challenging ones among them, a task that gives her a powerful medium of providing instruction. This type of integration helps the teacher cope with the indifferent learner in the class who finds the disciplined rule based instruction uninteresting, but finds that the applicative style of learning, where he is called upon to exercise his own power of judgement in coming to conclusions, an interesting diversion.

It is interesting to note that this type of integrated education is not a new phenomenon in the context of the Indian situation as the inspiration has been taken from the policies that were in vogue in the ancient Indian universities of Takshashila, Vallabhi, Nalanda and Vikramshila. At these great learning centres of the past, the focus was on a multi-disciplinary style of education, instead of one of isolation. Also, in the current times, the NEP Policy that India has adopted is not a pioneering educational step because learning institutions such as in Singapore have adopted this methodology and have found it highly successful. Trickling it down to the individual teacher in the classroom therefore, is just a baby step in this direction, and thus there should be no hesitancy in implementing it in our school system of today.

With the current narrowing down of learning in schools to one that is geared towards providing education for pursuing a successful career, the teacher in the classroom is straitjacketed into teaching just what the course of syllabus requires. She has no scope for further innovation and thus her pupils become divided into achievers and non-achievers, leading to huge psychological problems among the learners. When the teacher arranges her lessons to be in sync with the arts, be it music or theatre, or dance or fine art, she brings back the joy of learning into individual pupils, who like to show off their skills at one or other of the fine arts and thus learning is absorbed much more easily and as a fun exercise.

The integration of the arts by the teacher into the general learning environment will also make learning more holistic. It will update scientific skills in pupils because she will try to bring around relevant comparisons between say, a chemical reaction and the effect of colours or the angular placement of light, in a physics lesson. As for the a student in the classroom, it will mean a change in 21st century learning, where there is no demarcation in the learning of the fine arts and mathematics as far as their approach is concerned.

Also, the teacher will be forced to assess the students' output in terms of acquiring core capabilities such as rational thinking, concluding, rather than mere memorising to score good marks. In this way, the teacher manages to impress on the learner that education is a future investment into becoming a better human being instead of merely a student bent on

competing and then scoring marks to get college admission in the desired institution. In fact, the diehard competitive spirit of the student is fired when the teacher infuses an integrated education based on the principles of creating art because she unlocks the process of free thinking, assessing and many other individual learning traits, which then become handy tools for problem solving. Another aspect of this art based integration in the hands of teachers is that it gives our ancient culture, and traditions and our aesthetic practices a more engaging platform (Olevnik, 1993).

Such a policy of integration has also received an approving nod from none other than University Vice-Chancellors such as Dr Nagesh V. Bettakote, who welcomed the NEP move, saying that it would break down the artificial barrier between subjects, which has been the trend in our education system. Thus teachers of one subject will no longer remain totally cocooned within their own boundaries and find no reason for interaction with others

On the flip side too, the teachers can reap the benefits of this policy. Earlier, the arts were not much sought after in school education, because it did not provide employment opportunities for teachers, except in their specific fields. In an article in 'The Hindu' of 21 August 2021, it was stated, "Earlier, they used to render songs or perform in functions, while a few evolved to present concerts. But now they also have opportunities to be employed as resource persons in schools and colleges." Such a step would definitely be a game changer for both students and teachers alike.

The New Education Policy 2020 has thus combined the divergent approaches in educational institutions. This is also recognition of the status of the Fine Arts inn the cultural fabric of India. Despite its ancient roots within our land, our present education system has denigrated the latter day gurus to a side role and thus the chasm between formal education and our ancient culture has widened beyond words. Our children revel in western arts, such as pop or hip hop, without knowing anything about our styles of rhythmic Hindustani music's tarana presentation, or fast beat Kathak dancing, or colourful artworks on walls of houses, etc, which is a way of discovering the changes in the seasons, the crop growing cycle, the source of our literature, to mention a few.

With this new directive, already concrete steps in this direction have begun to trickle down. In Karnataka, there are 16,000 schools and 800 colleges where the courses will have to be offered besides in about 25 universities. But none of the educational institutions were in a position to create a framework for studies and the onus was on universities such as the KSGH Music and Performing Arts University to cater to their requirements. "We have to not only churn out musicians but also scholars who will be the resource

persons required to handle the course curriculum in future.” Quoted from The Hindu 21 August 2021.

That this involvement of the class teacher in integrating art education in the classroom is not a new phenomenon is evident in the multiple intelligences theory, developed by Howard Gardner (1983), which points out those children think and learn based on their individual intellectual strengths. These intellectual strengths, according to Gardner can basically be divided into seven intelligences such as musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Thus the teacher in the classroom has a number of choices to utilise and make her lessons appealing to individual children through the exploitation of the seven intelligences.

Art education, particularly, as viewed through the lens of art instruction helps children with the development of motor skills, language skills, social skills, decision-making, risk-taking, and inventiveness.

Not just during the course of regular studies can the teacher integrate her methodology to a broad based canvas, but can also give meaning to the child’s individual value system through it. The child who has learnt to create a beautiful painting of his own making, has not just produced a likeable object, but he has also spread his learning to other disciplines, with the help of a discerning and positive teacher. She can make the child feel important from the standpoint of discovery as also recovery. The child begins to appreciate not just what is in his surroundings, but ventures to discover the ways of other cultures other styles and other periods of human existence.

In their art classes, DBAE students not only find creative self-expression in art production, but explore works of art from the points of view of the three other disciplines. In art history, students discover stylistic qualities characteristic of individual artists and schools of art, as well as meanings and values communicated by works of art across space, time, and cultural boundaries. Art criticism enables students to talk and write about works of art, using critical inquiry to describe, analyze, interpret, and make informed value judgments. Aesthetic issues are discussed in questions about the nature, definition, and significance of art.

All the above advantages of integration are more likely to be effective in the junior classes. When it comes to the secondary level, where core subjects have a large content per se, teachers might be tempted to become choosy and tackle lessons in a linear fashion. But this can be avoided, if teachers are made open to the immense potential of art criticism to their teaching methodology. Such a linkage helps the teacher to train her pupils into first doing a visual or literary examination of the subject they are studying. Thereafter, the teachers guide them into verbalizing their thoughts and hence, use their critical powers to come to a well formed conclusion. Also, in depth

studies on the topic can be encouraged by the teacher by encouraging her students to learn a bit about the individual artist and then writing their own opinion or findings based on this backdrop knowledge. In this way, the teacher helps her pupils to write independent, well thought out compositions, where the child begins with observations and ends with giving a proper and balanced critique following it. Furthermore, the teacher opens the gates to individual research for the child and helps the child widen his scope of learning at his own pace and style.

To an increasing degree, multicultural studies are infused into DBAE programs to ensure that art is studied contextually as well as historically. The shift in curriculum is from “What is Art?” to the equally big aesthetic question “What is Art For?” The result is that art is seen as fundamental to societies worldwide and throughout time. Students study how art functions as an agent of transmission of culture and discover that there are many art worlds, none more important than another. For DBAE students, the concept of art changes and widens. Also, the widening of knowledge for the pupil was done in a very natural way, without any form of stress or irritation for the pupil.

As the teacher develops an explorative mindset to accompany her teaching process, she instils in her charges a spirit of constant inquiry to find out the ‘whys’ and ‘wherefores’ behind their learning. This habit keeps classroom learning a vibrant session, instead of one which is spent in correcting tired and disinterested pupils to pay attention to the class proceedings. Both students therefore become better observers of their surroundings and begin to enjoy every moment of the learning process. In today’s system of digital learning, therefore these skills of observation and handling of visual aids is a necessity and the teacher who has initiated the skill of interdependence among her charges, has equipped them to be better citizens of the future worlds.

Moreover, the learning process is one of proactive components. While in the higher classes students are adept in giving digital presentations of their projects and other learning methods, the younger ones are encouraged to use the tool to download lessons or even make diagrams, etc. These processes need no longer be mechanical outputs but can become sources of immense individuality, when the teacher has trained her charges into applying the tools of art making, such as observation, interpretation, colour usage, proportion, etc, to make their individual work stand out as special. Thus integrating art and teaching is a handy tool to keep the class usefully engaged during the school timing.

Students with the aesthetic skills that are born out of the teacher taking pains to integrate the tools of art making into the learning process are good at creating visually catchy specimens, such as making models for the science fair, or developing a math fair quiz or coding

and organising their botany or biology specimens, etc. Students get engrossed in such projects so completely that they seldom count the hours of effort put in. Thus the habit of working beyond the requirement of a class or homework routine makes pupils and teachers realise that learning is a 24-hour occupation and is not dictated by the number of periods a teacher teaches or the amount of homework that a child has to complete. These pupils are more likely to enjoy coming to school and the teacher too, will be more enthusiastic about their work.

So far, in this paper, we have been engaged in presenting the direct benefits that accrue from integrating art education with teaching methodologies. Besides these advantages, there are also some hidden benefits that accrue for a teacher who has oriented her classroom methodology to a wider base. As the arts are an output of the culture of one's land, teachers who have consciously worked towards art applications to their classroom work, begin to get an in depth knowledge of our culture. This added knowledge makes them better citizens, who are sensitized to the land and its people and thus become better citizens, who are proud of their heritage, instead of remaining indifferent to our past and picking up the trendy props of culture that are thrown at them through media channels and which are not always, a true depiction of our true cultural worth. In this way, a sensitised teacher becomes a better ambassador of the land for her pupils rather than a teacher who has adopted a conservation and divisive approach to teaching and imparting knowledge to her pupils (NEP, 2020).

As classrooms of today do not exist in isolation, the teacher in them is not just an individual, but a means of unprecedented connectivity with the rest of the world. Thus sitting in her classroom, the teacher and the pupils can pay virtual visits to the best science and technology fairs, not to speak of making a trip to NASA or to the Louvre Museum in Paris. All these opportunities

help both teacher and pupil widen their horizons and learning and participation not just a class limited exercise, but one which can be hooked on to areas of interest worldwide.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, it must be made clear to every teacher that unlike the past, the learning process today, is not that of a teacher in a superior role, looking down or ordering the pupil to do her bidding. Instead, it is a shared exercise with the teacher and her pupil on common platform of discovery, using the tools of creativity, observation coordination, as also the probability of uncertainty that might result from using unorthodox ways for achieving the quest of knowledge. All this freedom of expression and joint participation does not in any way detract from the attitude of respect that the presence of a teacher in the classroom automatically brings forth. The sense of discipline and methodology that a teacher instils in the class during lesson time continues intact and it is only the approach to learning that is now given a freer rein. As there is no concept of a right away in art, learners, along with their teacher become bold experimenters who take things in their stride and learn things at their own pace and of their own making.

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