

Art in Education

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Educating the same batch of students for two consecutive years was an opportunity for me to explore education and understand what more it needs. My students of Class IV were doing well in academics. But opening books, discussing chapters and writing was monotonous for many. The students scored well but were unable to express their thoughts and feelings. There were times when I saw them crying but could not make them share what bothered them.

I started visiting communities, meeting parents but the children managed to hide their feelings. I remember Anuj (name changed), who seemed a happy child. But it was impossible for a teacher to make him complete his work. Initially, I thought of him as a notorious child and tried making him understand the importance of education in life. But getting no result, I visited his home, a small rented accommodation with no kitchen on the fifth floor, which housed six members. I could hear noises that would have disturbed him while studying. Two families shared two

rooms with no separate doors. Even if one sat down to study, it was impossible to continue in the chaos. I realised that there is more to what we notice at school — family feud, parental fights, poverty and lack of space.

I decided to make my class an open space, where students trust each other, where they are not scared of sharing who they are and what they think. I started with an experiment of using art for educating them and asked them to draw a secret thing of theirs, promising that it will not be disclosed. It took two hours to get the children draw.

What the children drew showed their hidden emotions and feelings. Through this activity, I discovered that one of my students was once molested by a shopkeeper and she thought that it was all her fault, no matter how hard she tried hiding, it was evident in her drawing. I decided to follow-up with the activity and asked them to talk about how they felt after doing it. It was to make them learn the skill of giving constructive feedback.

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The next day, I continued with the same task and asked them to look at their drawings and write whatever they saw. The students were excited as they were working on something that they had made based on their personal experiences. And this is how my first experiment of amalgamating arts into education worked out.

Art strengthens the confidence of students. It lets them outflow their insecurities. However, what is enthralling is the 'purgation of expression' that the education system is missing completely. The students are grasping knowledge tested with formative and summative assessment but education needs a revolution that works towards creating an emotionally safe environment for the students. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "The encouragement of creativity from an early age is one of the best guarantees of growth in a healthy environment of self-esteem and mutual respect — critical ingredients for building a culture of peace."

Experiential learning not only evolved me as an educator but also enhanced my awareness for the role of arts in education.

Figuring out a problem, consolidating a plan to solve it, spreading awareness about it through drama, writing and storytelling are important for education. Not only the students learnt the value of ownership and goodness but this project also

created a bond of unity in the class. The class became more confident and solution oriented, which was evident in the academic push seen in that unit.

Dr Howard Gardner's 1983 Theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that our school teaches two kinds of intelligences — verbal and logical-mathematical. But there are other intelligences too that need to be focused upon. They are — visual or spatial, bodily or kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal, and its foundations are set by music, theatre, dance and poetry. These foundations, when integrated with education, result into better analytical and cognitive skills among children and also provide them with a space for exploring themselves. It is the responsibility of the education system to ensure faith among the students that they can forget their insecurities when they enter the classroom and can come out of the closet to meet what they really are.

Creating a happy atmosphere in class is important in winning the trust of the students. And nothing does it better than music and dance. The students of my class had their first dance on '*Dekho-dekho kya ye paed hai*' from the film *Taare Zameen Par*. Every time we danced, we discussed about coordination, new steps that were to be included, lyrics and rhythm. The students learned to listen, meditate, understand, comprehend and connect the lyrics with the real world. They learned to produce it

themselves, figuring out their interests and passion. Music does wonders by creating an imaginative world for the students.

I acknowledge that art reaches those students, who are not otherwise reached by the usual teaching methods. It transforms the learning environment and leads to balanced development in the students. Storytelling, for instance, becomes a form of expression for them, full of colours and learning, which teaches them about leadership, teamwork and spreads smiles too. In general, the students love to draw and I tried experimenting with it, figuring out if it can be used as a medium of education. The class was divided into four groups and each one came up with its own story, teaching a moral lesson, later to be painted on a chart paper in a dialogue form. The students prepared dialogue versions of paintings dealing with issues from child labour to domestic violence. It not only disclosed issues that bothered them but also taught them the skills of ownership, taking initiatives and respecting other's perspectives. Their confidence got a boost as their paintings were exhibited at the community mela organised by the school.

With all these experiments and experiences, I realised that art can be a milestone in creating empathetic humans. The sense of openness that many lose within the four walls of a classroom does not teach the students acceptance and confidence and they are raised within the sheer

rigidity of schedules and stereotypes. They are taught to question but not to themselves. They are taught to learn but not about themselves. They experiment in science labs but not with what they like. Hence, they end up losing themselves as they grow, which is evident from the increasing number of frustration, depression and suicide cases among students.

PRACTICES TO BE FOLLOWED FOR INCULCATING ARTS INTO EDUCATION

- Every student has one's own way of expressing. Hence, the teacher must not be limited to just one medium and explore activities in music, poetry and theatre too, so that the students can choose to express themselves through rhythm (music), words (poetry) or actions (theatre).
- Start devising your own methods to integrate art into education like theatre is a wonderful way to teach 'Reading comprehension and speech'. The dialogues and the frequency of speech in theatre help improve the reading skill of the students.
- Poetry creates a hidden but secure vent for the students. At times, it permits them to release negative emotions, leading to mental healing.
- Do not treat art as a different subject, otherwise the students will not use it as a form of expression but end up running after grades or marks for this too. Art goes

beyond what already exists. A teacher's role should be to develop young minds through exploration, discovery and creativity.

- The focus must be more on expressing and learning rather than assessment.
- Make dance an exploratory experience for them. Let them experiment with the steps and encourage them to contribute in the dance steps. Dance helps in coordination and inculcation of discipline among students as they memorise the choreography (steps), rehearse and practise in groups.
- Let them decide a social issue and mentor them to create drama to spread awareness about it. Guide them to write their own dialogues, deciding their speech and actions. Ask them to use objects, props and resources, leading to creative impulses. Dorothy Heathcote's innovative approach to education, 'Mantle of the Expert', describes drama as taking on an enterprise with the class functioning as people running a project, which can take few weeks. Their role in a fictional context brings a sense of responsibility to learning.