

The Challenges and Opportunities of Arts Education in India (General Article)

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“Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life.”
-Pablo Picasso

It is known by all that the arts make life worth living. We can earn a living by any means, but we are sustained and fed by the beauty and creativity of the arts, whatever form we may choose them in. The arts illustrate all the different notes and colors of the human experience, teach us how to express our emotions, to marvel at the talents and dedication of our fellows, and to be inspired and assured in our own sense of creativity.

One cannot overstate their importance in the stressful world we live in today. The arts provide a state of joyous escapism that allows us to live life more meaningfully. In short, life without art would be dull and one-dimensional. Therefore, it goes without saying, that we must ensure that an appreciation for and aptitude in the arts must be encouraged in our children from a young age.

The benefits of an education in the arts for young children goes beyond the skills of painting or pottery. Research worldwide has found that the arts benefit children in a wide variety of subjects, helping them become visual learners, improving inventiveness and initiative, assisting in language and motor skills, and boosting critical thinking.

A report by Americans for the Arts states that young people who participate in the arts for three hours a day on three days each week for one year are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, to participate in a math and science

fair, or to win an award for writing an essay or poem than children who do not participate.

Despite its many advantages, the arts have been woefully undervalued in India, a nation where academic excellence in the sciences is regarded as the most important aspect of a child's upbringing and education.

The competitive nature of the education system in India combined with the sheer volume of students creates an environment filled with stress factors, which are only compounded by the lack of a creative outlet through which to work through said stress. Children grind under the wheel of academic expectation, many attending extracurricular tuitions to supplement their school work. And all the while, the arts fall by the wayside, seen as a softer and often less viable option for a child's future.

This undervaluing is a result of a lack of employability in the arts sector in India.

Less than 50% of Arts graduates in India find full time employment following graduation. With statistics like this, what well-meaning parent could, in full conscience, support their child in pursuing a career in the arts? In order to improve arts education, we must improve arts outcomes. As an arts teacher, I cannot stress enough the need for employment opportunities for artists.

Art education in India has immense possibilities for growth when it comes to creative and vibrant learning, but it requires vision. There is a huge gap in the way art education policies, curriculum guidelines, and teaching strategies are framed and implemented. The outdated

model of arts education in India, continuing on from colonial times, is heavily rooted in a lack of imagination, favoring imitation over creativity. A change is required in eliminating rote learning and exam-based education and instead allowing for more practical arts education, in the form of workshops, apprenticeships, and more.

Art education has the immense possibility to develop creative and vibrant learning environments in schools. But we are killing this by our lack of vision. There is a huge gap in the way art education policies, curriculum guidelines, and teaching strategies are framed and implemented. Art enables reflection. As much as it allows to widen your horizon and look outwards, it also lets you peek inside. I think there are hardly few disciplines which do this, but art does this more engagingly. Art education allows the student to realise that there exist diverse ways of understanding the reality, that there are numerous ways to express and no one way is better than the other. It enables curiosity, it allows to think out of the box, question, experiment, introspect and do all this through play and fun. Luckily, for India, a revolutionary change occurred on 29th July 2020, allowing for the implementation of a historical integrated learning system by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The new vision for art education must understand its community better and start building its foundations from the roots. Teachers who come out of existing art education need to do a lot of unlearning to be a part of this journey.

The main change of the new system is that the arts are integrated with the teaching and learning processes of all subjects from classes 1-12. This is a much needed breath of fresh air, that going forward, will create a real change in the lives of the people who will form the future of our nation with creativity and imagination along with happiness and emotional touch with people, Society, Nation and Nature.

Art enables reflection and conversation. It allows us to build mirrors into our souls and windows into the souls of others. Remember the last time you watched a film and talked about it for hours after? The last time a piece of music made you cry? That time you saw a

painting and marveled at how the painter could have created it out of pigment and parchment? These moments are like the keys on a piano, waiting to be struck. We must encourage future generations to play their own pianos, pick up their own paintbrushes, don their dance costumes, so that we can strike many more chords. And we start that encouragement at home, at school, and in our own minds, so that the arts can live another day. ART is not for a few but for all like education freedom for all.

Saul Bellow, on science and art in his Nobel lecture in 1976 highlighted :”...Only art penetrates what pride, passion, intelligence and habit erect on all sides – the seeming realities of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which without art, we can’t receive. Proust calls these hints our “true impressions.” The true impressions, our persistent intuitions, will, without art, be hidden from us and we will be left with nothing but a ‘terminology for practical ends’ which we falsely call life”.

Pablo Picasso has further beautifully summed up that “There are painters who transform the sun into a yellow spot, but there are others who, thanks to their art and intelligence, transform a yellow spot into the sun.”

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