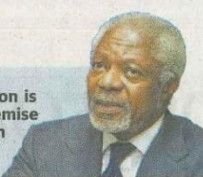




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The creativity quotient

An education in the arts can help foster lateral thinking and prepare students for the workplace of the future.

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Think back to your earliest memories of effectively learning anything – even something as simple as discovering an instrument that helps you write. When your mother handed you a crayon and turned a blind eye when you scribbled arbitrary, albeit colourful lines on the wall? Or in arts and crafts class in pre-school, when you gleefully tried to fashion a paper boat from colour paper? Or was it when you emphatically mouthed Mark Anthony's speech, along with the actor on stage – "Friends, Romans, countrymen..." – as you learnt about the skill of oration for your literature class?

While math and science are shoved down every student's throat, irrespective of whether or not any interest is evinced, what about imparting knowledge on subjects that contribute to students' all-round development – one that not only helps them ace exams but also sensitises them to the world around? For instance, inculcating lateral thinking, the ability to come up with need-based solutions to a given problem, thinking out-of-the-box, and so on. This is where integrating the arts into teaching assumes paramount significance.

This explains why Nisha Nair, founder, Artsparks Foundation in Bengaluru, set up the organisation in 2014, with the intent of contributing to the dialogue, building awareness, and support for robust arts education in India. Nair, has spent two decades in the U.S. and worked towards improving the quality of education. Having spent her childhood in Bengaluru, she was determined to effect change in the Indian education system.

"Research indicates that meaningful experiences with visual art contribute to the development of valuable thinking skills and attitudes whose benefits extend well beyond the art room," she elaborates. "The ability to pose questions, test ideas, take creative risks, solve problems, think flexibly and divergently, deal with ambiguity, persevere, and collaborate effectively, are just some of the many skills and attitudes that are developed and strengthened through engagements with visual art. Involvement in the visual arts is also associated with gains in critical thinking and communication skills. Beyond this, visual arts learning helps improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork."

Role of the teacher

Anupama Gowda, Founder, Workbench Projects, and Open Minds Education Initiative also led *Kali-Kalasu*, a few years back. It is a joint initiative of the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, the German Cultural organisation and India Foundation for the Arts, Bengaluru. She explains how teacher training is of utmost importance in terms of imparting arts-led education.

"*Kali-Kalasu* is a working philosophy which places the school teacher as the single most important agent in the Indian educational scenario – the agent of positive cultural engagement and a meaningful development. Hence, *Kali-Kalasu* continues to be an arts-based teacher training programme for government school teachers across the length and breadth of Karnataka," explains Anupama. "The Kannada words, *Kali-Kalasu*, translate to 'learn and teach', and serve to remind teachers that education is a lifelong quest, and that the joy of learning stems from the joy of teaching," she adds.

Anupama opines that an education steeped in the arts can equip students for the rigours of the working environment of the future. She cites the example of *The Aims of Education*, a position paper by NCERT, which emphasises

that "education should be a liberating process" and that the curriculum should promote three key areas of development in the student – aid in the self-development of the individual through an exposure to the right set of values, impart sound knowledge in "constructivist" ways, and foster a sense of curiosity and excitement about learning.

"Within the space of the classroom, the arts can address gaps in curriculum, pedagogy, and the imagination that emerge from the putative 'banking concept' of education, with its hierarchical and unilateral dispensing of information," she says.

Nair believes that rote learning, the consequent regurgitation of facts, a one-dimensional approach to problem-solving – terms that are often synonymous with our education system – hinder authentic engagement, restrict in-depth understanding, discourage independent thought, and limit notions of intelligence. "The alternative is to offer students numerous opportunities to explore, experiment, and arrive at their own solutions. At Artsparks, we believe that a great education should equip children with these 21st century skills to handle life's complexities – skills such as flexible thinking, positive risk-taking, attention to detail, and more," she says.

Creativity and confidence

Educator Shaheen Mistri, CEO, Teach for India, believes, "A visual platform of disseminating knowledge has always been effective in better assimilation of the subject on hand, by students, as opposed to the conventional chalk-and-blackboard methods."

Around 23 years ago, when she was part of Akanksha Foundation, she explains how she noticed that whenever kids were given anything to work on creatively, and linked to the arts, not only was there a spike in their interest levels, there was also a direct correlation to how kids felt about themselves in terms of their confidence. She believes that arts can be effectively integrated to teach academics in a much more memorable way.

She elaborates on how such an education becomes even more important during high-school and college as students are exposed to a lot more stress and there is more pressure on them to perform. It would help if the academic content is taught through the lens of art. "Imagine learning about the French revolution through role play as opposed to making notes and learning it from notebooks!" she says, and her excitement is palpable.

So, how does an art-based education help students arm themselves for the working environment of the future?

Nair is quick to add, "Today's organisations need a workforce that is equipped with skills beyond the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic. To be successful in the workplace of the information age, one needs to be able to think about issues, critically. In an age where change is the only constant, understanding and applying 21st century learning skills allows us to be adaptive and innovative in responding to new demands and changing circumstances."

Anupama concurs. She explains how, the arts in education, instead of positioning the child as a passive recipient of information and knowledge which finds no points of reference in his/her own lived reality, positions the child as an active and autonomous subject who investigates his/her reality and exercises his/her imaginative capacities on what she/he has an immediate connection to. In this manner, the arts can help students find their own voice instead of speaking in a borrowed voice that the system legitimises.

"The intervention of the arts in education can promote cultural diversity, counteracting Indian education's centralised way of defining what and how a student must learn. This is how arts education can become a force for diversity, where diversity is understood as committed to accommodating contending interests, positions, preferences and perspectives, or ensuring a level playing field for rival conceptions of the meaningful or worthwhile," she concludes.



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