Voices from the Field 2021
Field Report from the Artists

A report by **S Kaladhar**

Prelude

Education is like the very life of the society. All educationists assert that for this education to take shape as a living process, collaboration of art education is the key. But along the road that our education system has traversed, it is a tragedy that it has not used art education as effectively as it should have. To correct this imbalance, we see that many institutions based on their priorities, are contributing to art education sector. India Foundation for Arts is one of the few such institutions. This institution has been taking up programs at different levels that touch different dimensions of Art. Also, it has targeted government schools in Karnataka and has been disbursing grants to art education projects so that the children in these schools get the direct benefit of these.

IFA sponsored artist's projects are making a definite impact on the school education system. We have undertaken this survey to discover, to analyze and understand these impacts from different dimensions and to discover what structural changes are to be undertaken so that these projects can have even more positive impacts.

Through this survey we intend to understand how interrelated are art-integrated learning, development of children, efforts of teachers and the impacts. With this we need to discover new possibilities that art integrated education presents itself.

Method of Survey

In this survey, a total of fourteen artists were selected and interviewed. First, they were given information regarding the survey by email and then contacted over phone to get introduced to one another and were requested to cooperate in the planned oral survey. The relevant questionnaire with ten questions was sent to them via WhatsApp. All interviews of this part of the survey of artists were done over phone. All fourteen artists shared their true experiences and opinions freely. These were copied into the blanks and the conversations were recorded. This final report is based on the information so collected.

About the artists interviewed

Sl. No.	Artist's name	Project	Medium through which interviewed
1	Anuradha	Children and reading of literature	Phone
2	Aparna Deshpande	Learning through farming	Phone
3	Aruna BT	*Veeragase* and children's learning	Phone
4	Chandrahas Y Jalihal	Architecture of Bahamani Sultans and painting	Phone
5	Kavya C	Sensitivity through fine arts	Phone

6	Mohan Kumar N	Learning of Kolata	Phone
7	Praveena	Back to Library	Phone
8	Ramagiri Police Patil	*Thrdal* of Kalyana Karnataka	Phone
9	Ramesha Narayana	Awareness about the social problems through visual arts	Phone
10	Riyaz	Development of child's mind through playback theatre	Phone
11	Sahana Pinjara	Development of child's mind through street plays	Phone
12	Santhosha DD	The art of *Somana Kunita* and learning	Phone
13	Savita Uday	Search for local folktales	Phone
14	Sunitha R	Tree – a biological system	Phone

Observations

Many aspects of the art-integrated education so far not observed came to fore through the interviews undertaken for this survey. To list a few: artist's way of functioning, priorities, planning types, challenges, how they were overcome, the ways in which different activities were organized.

Many of the artists were already familiar with IFA. Others had no idea of IFA. There were artists from the urban parts as well as from rural parts. Their projects have variety. If the rural projects appear as efforts to bring into schooling the local arts and traditions, urban ones appear to be projects that introduce mainstream art forms. As an example, Savita's project had the aim of introducing the stories of the local farming communities such as Halakki, Siddi and Kare. Kavya, in the same way, has the aim of her project as influencing learning through dance forms.

Most of the artists have shown a lot of commitment and have completed their projects in a planned manner in the time allotted with the complementary support. Some have gone slow because of various reasons; some have not completed it. Likewise, if some artists are satisfied over the methodology and results, some are not.

In general, we can classify the points observed through this survey as follows:

Commitment to art education:
- Introducing students to the wider world
- Connecting the various links of the curriculum
- Learning through exploration
- Time for art

The challenges faced by artists:
- Working with teachers
- Connect with community
- Political, social, caste and gender and financial factors
- Traditional classroom teaching and online teaching

Commitment towards art-education

a. **Introducing students to the wide world:** Children of government schools, especially in the rural parts, may internally have inherently artistic inspirations; their art sense dwindles even before sprouting for lack of right 'art' environment. But artists under these projects could come to school premises and create an art-environment to awaken the dormant art-sense of these children is really a significant phenomenon. These projects not only revitalize the art-dimension in children, but also imparts the worldly knowledge. Different programs of the project of "Back to the Library", undertaken by Pravin Belli of Mysore, made the school children learn something special. Children visited different libraries and learnt, among other things, how different books are arranged in libraries. This way many artists through their projects undertook field visits, workshops, camps and other activities to introduce children to the wide world around them.

b. **Contacting various links of the curriculum:** Curriculum is not something that happens only within the framework of the textbook. What is noteworthy is that the framework of curriculum extends even beyond the material of textbooks. The purpose of curriculum is fulfilled only when teaching, learning and evaluation all become meaningful and living processes. We could say that these processes have been more meaningfully fulfilled through the art integrated projects. For, art-integrated learning classes are not single tracked like the ordinary classes. These classes are shaped by the discussion between artists and children. Being so, artists always have a special attention towards children's learning. Artists know the necessary complementary links for that learning to be formed. For example, in Aruna's *Veeragase* project, instead of introducing *Veeragase* directly, a helpful friendly environment was first created and then *Veeragase* dress, folk games, theatre games, songs, dance were taught and finally the art of *Veeragase* itself was taught. He has brought out, through the children, poems and lessons of Kannada textbooks in the form of *Veeragase*.

c. **Learning through exploration:** To stimulate a sense of exploration is one of the objectives of education. We could say that the art-integrated learning has in it all the wide scope for this temperament to blossom and grow. We can imagine the gulf between the spirit of exploration in a child that has learnt in the ordinary learning space and the spirit of exploration in a child that has learnt through an art-integrated project. In the Playback Theatre project undertaken by Riyaz of Mysore, his observation was that children created their own small skits enacting their problems. These really are models for learning through exploration. Making drama a pretext to think about their problems, to formulate for themselves those problems and, more importantly, the thought process that searches for a solution to those problems is a model of a living education.

d. **Time for art:** While entering an organized framework of school system to manage art activities, time management is an important factor. Artists will have to make preparations beforehand to conduct art-related activities in a tense atmosphere in a system that has to complete lessons, conduct examinations and evaluate students along with many celebrations and other programs. To fruitfully utilize the space that is given to them prior preparation is a must. Sahana, who had undertaken the project related to Street Play, has completed it with necessary preparations in the three hours a week given to her. In the allotted period it may so happen that activities cannot be done as expected and the results

may not be forthcoming as expected. Then those activities need to be reformulated. Even though all these things demand more time, to conduct activities without preparation results in a wastage of time, according to Sahana.

Challenges faced by artists

Artists will have to face many kinds of challenges when they want to put their project into practice. Many artists contacted during this survey freely shared with us their opinions regarding the challenges they faced. They are: achieving a good harmony with local teachers, skirmishes with the community, politics, social problems and online education. In their opinion, these challenges, though in the beginning looked formidable, ended up teaching them something significant.

a. **Working with teachers:** The minute that artists step inside the school they are met by teachers. There is no doubt whatsoever that without a good rapport with these teachers the whole project would go awry. In this matter, each artist has a different experience. It so happens that if the artists happen to be a bit sensitive, it comes as no surprise that their sensitivity may appear to be egoistic behavior. Artists have shared that they have faced many such obstacles. One artist told us with pain that teachers cut down a plant that was crucial to his project. At times, there is the danger that teachers, who fail to grasp the meaning of art related projects, may look at the whole program as wasteful. The artist who was running a project on Street Play recalled that he was confronted by teachers with, "should our children perform on the streets? Why not teach them some magnificent drama on a fine stage?" Although difference of opinion and personal pride create an atmosphere full of skirmishes with teachers, in the end, the atmosphere clears up and the projects will have been completed.

b. **Connect with community**: Whenever artists with novel thoughts take up projects in schools, it is but natural that the community's look is turned toward the school. The community looks at the school with curious eyes as though something special is happening at the school. But the same community casts aspersions on the activities of artists who through their projects conduct uncustomary activities. An artist with a project on folklore shared his feelings with us. As per the project requirement he had to sound an instrument whose sound carried all through the village. This saw villagers trooping to school to enquire with misgivings what in the place of regular teaching was going on. Once suitable answer allayed their fears, they went back in agreement. They even encouraged other programs. This way, the community may sometimes react in extreme ways. At such moments it becomes important that artists, with their eloquence, manage the situation.

c. **Political, social, caste and sex and financial factors:** When managing art-related projects in government schools, some socio-economic factors pose challenges. Especially so when the projects in questions are non-traditional in character—they face the wrath of the society. During the project of *Somana Kunitha* artists had to face a challenge of this type. Some elders of the village had objections to a Dalit child taking part in *Somana Kunitha*. But artists managed the situation by convincing these elders. This kind of challenges is not always social. Issues relating to economic and gender matters also crop up.

d. **Traditional classroom teaching and online teaching:** Education sector too has suffered, like all other fields, faced with the Covid pandemic. Online learning appears to be an alternative. But artists have mixed feelings about this. Most of the artists are of the opinion that online learning is not an efficient medium for art-education. The reason being that art-education is based on total sensory experience. Therefore, it has to operate face to face, through personal connect. In all, most artists felt that online learning is something that does not appeal to them.

Transformation of teachers and plasticity

When artists step into the school with their projects, it is but natural that teachers of the school are curious. With time, if this curiosity does not turn into an understanding, it may have a negative influence. But the possibility of artists transforming those teachers with their communication skills always remains. Many artists have recorded in their interviews the fact of witnessing the transformation of many teachers. Artists have given examples of teachers who had seen the projects with doubtful eyes in the beginning gradually taking part, even a leading part, in the projects and more importantly, continuing the project in their own fashion once it was over.

Professional development

There are instances too of artists themselves learning in the process of implementing the projects and developing professionally from them. It is true that an artist is socially aloof in his own 'art world'. But art-related projects of this kind remold the artists somewhat in real terms. Many artists noted that these projects have sharpened their communication skills. During the project, they have to deal with children, school staff, community, officers of the education department. They get social acquaintance and, along with it, practical knowledge of how to deal with the society.

Recommendations

After analyzing and discussing the projects with these fourteen artists, we feel that certain recommendations can be made. They are:

Art related projects generally start with start of the academic year should be on the agenda of IFA. If they start half way down the year, they eventually will have a bad effect on the project.

One cannot say that most artists have knowledge of child psychology. How sensitive artists are towards children has to be specially considered when selecting them.

Art projects are seen only as temporary programs. It is not clear where children, who have shown interest in these, go from here? Who will guide them? This may lead children to

confusion. Therefore, IFA has to think in the direction of making these projects more abiding in nature.

We need to think in terms of expanding the reach of these projects. The project ought not to be limited to one school of one geographical region. We need to look forward to projects of a new type that reach out to at least a CRC.

Instead of artists taking up projects individually, IFA could encourage some artists to undertake projects from a collective spirit.

Art projects have mostly tackled only language related subjects. They have to break out of these limitations and extend their scope to other subjects too. Instead of one project limited to one subject, projects that can become links to connect all subjects should be given greater encouragement. For, school subjects have become hard to digest. If art can be a means to do away with this sense of difficulty, it truly becomes a model.

Ultimately…

IFA supported projects, as far as the schools where they are implemented, have no doubt created a sensation. This is a work of imparting a touch of life so that learning doesn't become mechanical. The artists, the students and the community have all gained from these projects. The report of this survey that is undertaken to make this process more responsive has taken shape based on our grasping of the situation. We wish the IFA's service for the art world become wider.

S Kaladhar,
Government Higher Primary School,
Shidlaghatta, Chikkaballapura District

Appendix: Questionnaire

1. What was the educational outcome in your project? What tools were used in facilitating these outcomes?
2. Do you think your project nurtured a learning environment within the community members and students in the school?
3. What challenges did your project encountered with school authorities, teachers and community members?
4. How has your project influenced the attitudes of teachers' and students towards arts education?
5. Have you personally gained from/ expanded your knowledge or practice through your project?
6. Do you think that artists add something unique to the schools and the education system?
7. In the light of COVID 19 and this unprecedented crisis how does online pedagogy impact the sustainability of arts education?
8. Can online pedagogy be effectively transformed and made more accessible and humane through arts education?
9. What could be other creative learning systems IFA uses for arts education to enrich our work within the government school system?
10. What does IFA need to expand access and deepen the quality of arts education?

Annexure Vb