

ART CONNECT

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Special Issue on Arts Education

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Editor

C.K. Meena

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Cover Image

An afternoon puppetry session begins at a Kali-Kalisku workshop in Heggodu,
Karnataka. Photographer: P.K. Ramesh

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Corrigendum

In our last issue, in the article titled 'Kelai Draupadi! (Listen Draupadi!)', we wrongly gave credit for the photographs to Sashikanth Ananthachari. The photographer was Pradeep Cherian. We regret the error.

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Editorial

This issue of *ArtConnect* is special in more ways than one. It is special when viewed from a personal and extremely selfish perspective because, as its editor, it is my maiden issue. But more importantly it is special because its contents are drawn from a single, momentous event: the Arts Education Conference jointly held by India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) and the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore on 11 and 12 December 2009 in Bangalore. Never before in India has there been a meeting of so many to discuss in such depth and for so long the subject of arts education. This issue captures what happened there and brings you some of the perspectives heard and experiences shared.

As this issue goes to print, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, popularly referred to as the RTE Act, has come into effect. And this provides yet another reason why this issue of *ArtConnect* is special. The RTE Act, passed on 1 April 2010, was still the RTE Bill when the conference was underway, and it provided an important backdrop to the proceedings. The realisation that children between six and fourteen years of age would soon have a fundamental right to education threw up several questions and points of debate. The primary question was: What kind of education are we talking about?

“Quality education” is the easy answer. To achieve it, one needs good teachers, good teaching methods and good training material. IFA can quietly boast of having had the foresight to address these areas, in its own small way, way back in 1998. Besides increasing support for arts education endeavours, we also initiated, with backing from the Goethe-Institut, a series of arts pedagogy training workshops for over 400 teachers in rural Karnataka, a programme that goes by the name of Kali-Kalisu (‘Learn and Teach’). The conference showcased the Kali-Kalisu initiative, which has already moved into its second phase, and Usha Rao’s grassroots coverage of it is included in this issue.

The arts can play a significant role in raising the quality of education—education for all, one must add, and not merely for the privileged. Educators at the conference presented creative ways of using the arts to teach subjects in school, and some, like Zakiya Kurrien and Arzu Mistry, who have contributed to this issue, spoke from the context of working with under-privileged children. Maya Krishna Rao’s piece is a fascinating look at how participatory theatre could be a highly effective teaching method.

There were speakers at the conference who addressed the fundamental aspects of the word ‘education’ and what it means in a multi-cultural, multilingual society such as ours. In his talk, which he turned into an essay for this issue, Shiv Visvanathan deconstructed some key words in the RTE Bill and showed how they represented a deadening homogeneity and the assertion of a dominant culture.

All the essays in this issue point to the fact that education in its truest sense must break the bounds of the printed page and plunge into life, engage with the world.

C.K. Meena
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A message from our partner

The Goethe-Institut's Arts Education initiative in India

The Goethe-Institut is the Federal Republic of Germany's cultural institution operational in ninety-one countries worldwide. In India we have been present for the last fifty years, still best known under the name Max Mueller Bhavan. Our everyday interactions with partners demonstrate firsthand that a thriving cultural landscape and confident arts and academic scenes decisively influence the development of a country: artists, academics and people engaged in the cultural sector are seismographs for, as well as creators of, social change.

Thus the Goethe-Institut is committed to supporting cultural players especially in countries earmarked as key areas in German development cooperation. The Goethe-Institut's "Culture and Development" initiative was launched in late 2008 to intensify and consolidate our activities in four fields, namely: capacity development, educational consulting/educational cooperation, creation of cultural spaces, and cooperation with civil society. Projects that are conducted in these areas are manifold, ranging from Cultural Management training in China and Africa, to initiating and supporting Public Art Projects like '48° Celsius' in Delhi, and offering professional support to archives and libraries for the preservation of heritage in Bosnia Herzegovina and Nigeria.

In Bangalore, we were very keen to carry out a collaborative project with an established local institution, and to connect, therefore, with the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) was a logical move. Our two organisations share many basic values, e.g. the importance of arts and culture in society as well as for the individual, the practice of enabling choice and avoiding force-feeding, the belief that the result of an intervention cannot be predetermined, and the importance of delivering impeccable quality.

At a meeting in which we discussed culture and development and options for a meaningful collaboration, Arts Education in rural government schools quickly emerged as an area that we deemed extremely important for a holistic education and the future of the arts. We also felt that arts education was a field where both institutions could contribute substantially in terms of expertise as well as established networks. IFA already had an established network of institutions engaged in arts education such as Ananya GML Cultural Academy, Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi, Gombe Mané and Ninasam, while the Goethe-Institut has far-reaching expertise and networks in areas like theatre, music, dance and fine arts pedagogies, as well as deep institutional knowledge on didactics and teaching methodology from its language school activities.

Thus the seed of Kali-Kalisku was sown and it is tremendously satisfying to see how much it has grown in a year, how deep its roots are, and how much fruit it has already borne. Apart from the work at the ground level, including the many workshops that were held in the far corners of Karnataka that touched the lives of over 400 teachers, I especially consider the Arts Education Conference in December 2009 a great success. It has been a pleasure to cooperate with all the partners involved and I am looking forward to another meaningful year ahead, for which the publication of this *ArtConnect* devoted exclusively to Arts Education already provides a significant beginning!

Dr Evelin Hust
(Director, Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore)



Contributors

Usha Rao is by profession a cultural anthropologist trained at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This background has provided the standpoint from which she takes up research projects, whether in the area of the arts or education. She has taught humanities and music and done theatre with students of Valley School Bangalore between 1999 and 2006, where she also had the opportunity to be associated with the arts programme in various capacities. Her association with IFA began as a senior researcher with the baseline study on Theatre Infrastructure for the Theatre Infrastructure Cell in 2008. She currently scripts and produces science audio programmes for government school children. As a freelancer, she has reviewed art in Bangalore for *Art India*.

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Shiv Visvanathan taught at the Delhi School of Economics. He was Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi and is currently Professor, Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, Gandhinagar. He has held visiting professorships in Arizona, London and Massachusetts. He is author of *Organizing for Science* (OUP, Delhi, 1985), *A Carnival for Science* (OUP, Delhi, 1997) and has co-edited *Foul play: Chronicles of Corruption* (Banyan Books, Delhi, 1999). He has been consultant to the National Council of Churches and *Business India*. He is a regular columnist to newspapers like *The New Indian Express*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *Asian Age* and *Economic Times*.

Zakiya Kurrien is the co-founder and co-director of the Centre For Learning Resources, a non-governmental organisation in Pune that provides technical support to improve the quality of elementary education and early childhood care and education for socio-economically disadvantaged children. She has an M.A. in Education from Smith College, USA, and long teaching experience in India and abroad. She is involved in designing teacher-education programmes and teaching-learning materials in a range of curricular areas such as language development, the teaching of reading, mathematics, environmental education and early childhood education. The training package developed by her, entitled 'Active Learning In Early Childhood', is published in several Indian languages.

Arzu Mistry has a BFA from California College of the Arts and an Ed.M from Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is a Research Associate with Project Vision, an education research collective at the Srishti College of Art Design and Technology, Bangalore. Arzu is dedicated to the arts as a medium of personal empowerment, positive social change and an essential in teaching and learning. Over the past decade her involvement with progressive education has spanned collaborative arts-integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum design, classroom practice, community arts projects, non-profit leadership, countywide arts-integration efforts, teacher professional development and arts education practice in low-income communities. Arzu is primarily a visual artist and has a passion for dance.

Maya Krishna Rao is a performer and teacher. She makes one-woman multi-media shows with her own scripts. She also devises participatory theatre programmes for school children. She took her M.A. in Theatre Arts from Leeds and worked for theatre-in- education companies in England. She is visiting faculty at the National School of Drama, Delhi and also creates plays for their TIE company. As part of the B.El.Ed course in Delhi University, Maya trains teachers in the use of drama for classroom teaching. She is also a trained Kathakali artist. Maya's works have been received with critical acclaim in several theatre festivals in India and abroad.

C.F. John opted for the *gurukul* (traditional Indian) system of learning after his studies in philosophy and was initiated into art by Jyoti Sahi at Silvepura, Bangalore. He has also been a disciple of Anthony Devasy of Kalakendra in Thrissur, Kerala state. Besides being part of over forty group exhibitions in India and abroad (including in London and Paris) since 2000, John has also had four solo shows each in Germany and India since 1991. He has also been organising site/theme specific art events using installations, dance and photography. Some of the major theme and sites for the art events were territory, mangroves, open wells, urban violence and cultural pluralities. John has won one national and two international awards. He was selected by BBC Radio 3 as one among twelve artists internationally whose individual approaches have led to innovations in their field.

The Arts Education Conference: Contexts, Concepts and Practices in Schools —An Overview

The IFA Team

Photographs by Shai Heredia and Irfan Mohammed show scenes from *Simple Dreams*, designed and directed by Dadi D. Pudumjee and performed by The Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust on 11 December 2009 at the Arts Education Conference.

That cultural diversity is as necessary for the human race as bio-diversity is for the natural world was formally recognised by the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Paris, 2 November 2001. That the arts are not a luxury but an entitlement has been tacitly recognised by every progressive individual and organisation working in education in India. Thus the 'Arts Education Conference: Contexts, Concepts and Practices in Schools', jointly organised by India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) and the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore on 11 and 12 December 2009, took it as self-evident that arts education is not a mere ancillary to education but is crucial to economic advancement and, indeed, a means of fostering global understanding and togetherness.

The IFA Team provides an overview of the debates and deliberations and experiences shared during this pioneering two-day conference.



IFA chose arts education—arts in education as well as education in the arts—as a thrust area over a decade ago. The arts education programme has come a long way since the initial two-day meeting in March 1998, attended by educationists and artists, which opened out possibilities for the programme. IFA substantially increased support for endeavours that strengthened the role of arts in education, and projects that pointed to new directions in education in the arts. Experiences on the ground, and the advice of experts, have helped us revise and sharpen our strategy over the years. Our broad areas of focus are support for the teaching community, and advocacy for arts education.

The meaning and the role of arts education, as expressed in various policy documents of the government since Independence, have undergone a sea change. For instance, the 1952-53 report of the Education Commission saw the objective of arts education as teaching students economically viable crafts and the dignity of labour, and nurturing their appreciation of cultural heritage. Through the Kothari Commission Report of 1964-66 and the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs) of 1975, 1988, and 2000, the purpose of arts education has seen a paradigm shift to the development of

aesthetic sensibility and free expression. And now we have the NCF 2005, which prescribes that art be made a subject in schools, with evaluation and grading. It has taken note of the alarming devaluation of the arts in education, and the simultaneous emphasis on superficial displays of 'arts' at school functions that are aimed at enhancing the prestige of the school and have nothing to do with the children's development.

The Arts Education Conference took place against the backdrop of a momentous step taken by the Indian government: the passage in parliament, on 4 August 2009, of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill (which became an Act on 1 April 2010). But while the Bill guaranteed a right to schooling, there remained the matter of the right to a quality education. What role could the arts play in achieving the objective of quality education across all sections of society? The conference examined this question and discussed how syllabi could be designed, given that the NCF 2005 had made a case for the inclusion of the arts in education curricula. This inclusion is perhaps made easier by the breathing space afforded by a couple of progressive

measures by the government: the Indian Council of Secondary Education (ICSE) Board loosening the shackles on the curricula up until Class Eight and, more dramatically, the CBSE Board introducing a system by which students may opt not to be examined at the Class Ten stage. Although it is a forward-thinking document, the NCF 2005 is not without its weaknesses, and the conference critically appraised its recommendations even as it discussed concrete ways in which arts education aspirations could be translated into workable initiatives.

The Right to Education Bill focussed on children in the age group of six to fourteen, thus leaving out the 157.86 million Indian children between the ages of zero and six. Globally, research has noted that early childhood is a crucial stage at which neglect can irreversibly impact the child's holistic development while care can lead to improvement in health, cognitive ability and performance at school. The conference articulated the role of the arts in early childhood education. Kindergarten teachers have traditionally used arts in their teaching, but only as a tool for education and development. Can the very young appreciate art, develop aesthetic sensibilities, and even





become proficient in an art form? Participants presented specific examples of arts education pedagogies in an engaging manner, opening them out for learning and discussion.

The relationship between the arts as a means (tool), as an end (subject), and as a guiding philosophy (pedagogy) formed part of the discussions. This echoed the World Conference on Arts Education conducted by UNESCO in 2006, which dealt with questions such as: Is arts education taught for appreciation alone or should it be seen as a means to enhance learning in other subjects? Should art be taught as a discipline for its own sake or for the body of knowledge, skill and values to be derived from it (or both)? Is arts education for a gifted few in selected disciplines or is arts education for all? These were questions that the Arts Education Conference, too, kept coming up against and responding to.

The conference was also aimed at showcasing and extending IFA's Kali-Kalisku (which translates as 'Learn and Teach') initiative. Kali-Kalisku is a series of Goethe-Institut-supported arts pedagogy training workshops that has brought arts education to over 400 teachers in the villages and small towns of the state of Karnataka. These workshops have included

modules on music, movement art, literature, visual arts, theatre and puppetry. Thirty of the teachers who attended the Kali-Kalisku workshops were present at the conference.

A unique exercise

It was for the first time in India that the subject of arts education had been deliberated on so thoroughly over two whole days by a rare confluence of about sixty public figures. Mr Sanjay Iyer, IFA Programme Executive, who conceptualised the conference and was the driving force behind it, was able to bring together teachers, theorists, policy-makers, artists, students and resource persons sharing their perspectives and experiences.

Theorists and policy-makers emphasised the importance of developing an understanding of arts education suited to a culturally diverse and fragmented society such as ours. Mr Chiranjiv Singh, IFA trustee and former ambassador to UNESCO, in his welcome address said that we could not build an understanding of art education in India without taking into account its multilingual culture. Mr Akshara K.V., teacher and theatre director who leads the Ninasam group of organisations (in Heggodu,

Shimoga district, Karnataka), spoke about arts education in the context of globalisation, a context in which the 'home' must constantly engage with, as well as resist, the 'world'. Dr Jyoti Sahi, who has wide national and international experience in teaching the arts, and is faculty at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore, pointed out that since we live in a global culture, educational methods must incorporate cross-cultural symbols and acknowledge the impact of new fields of knowledge.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity asserts that culture and the arts are powerful mediators in the universal quest for empathy with and dialogue among divergent ideologies and worldviews. In the same vein, Mr Armoogum Parsuramen, Director of the UNESCO office in New Delhi, saw arts education not as an extracurricular activity but as a discipline with which to address ways of living together and fostering mutual understanding. It is a universal human right, which must extend to children without access to formal schools, such as those who have disabilities or belong to immigrant or cultural minority populations.

How can art come to the aid of





children living in extremely difficult circumstances? Dr Shekhar Seshadri, Professor at the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurological Sciences, Bangalore, has for many years been involved with art-based therapy, and he explained the significant role that the arts play in the mental health of children. Ms Zakiya Kurrien, Co-Director of the Centre For Learning Resources (CLR), and Ms Arzu Mistry, Research Associate at Project Vision, demonstrated the arts education pedagogies they use in their work with socio-economically disadvantaged children. Ms Kurrien described how CLR, a non-governmental technical support organisation based in Pune, tried to address the challenges of working in schools with scant resources and inadequately trained teachers. Ms Mistry spoke of how Project Vision, an education research collective developing alternative educational models, had joined hands with the Association for Voluntary Action to start learning centres in Bangalore's slums.

Certainly, the schoolteacher appears to be, as IFA's Executive Director Mr Anmol Vellani put it, "the single most important agent in the Indian educational scenario—the

agent of positive cultural engagement and meaningful development”. But the teacher can do little in an unimaginative and constrictive system. There is an inadequate philosophical understanding of arts education and why it should be pursued, said Mr Rohit Dhankar, founder of Digantar, a school with an alternative pedagogy that is also a resource centre. Mr Dhankar, who has been deeply involved with curriculum and teacher development for many years, said that arts education’s aim of preserving cultural heritage can lead to artificial and deadening consequences. Mr Satish Jayarajan, the principal of Mallya Aditi International School, Bangalore, one of the rare schools that consider arts education an entitlement for all, stated that the collateral benefits of a broad-based arts education include enhancement of critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal and collaborative skills. Ms Kurrien pointed out that even in well-equipped urban schools, the arts education imparted does not take into account the concepts we have come to associate with it: creativity, intuition, freedom, originality, flexibility and aesthetic appreciation. The child should be allowed to

perceive the world, not be taught how to see it, said the visual artist Mr C.F. John. Unfortunately, in the school context, the arts are understood as mere drawing and painting.

What in our education system perpetuates a lack of connectedness between our environment and us? This question of Ms Mistry’s found echoes in others at the conference. Ms Sulagna Sengupta, parent of a seven-year-old who studies at an alternative school in Bangalore, wondered how one could bring the child’s experiences within the ambit of school, and nurture creative processes without conventional grading. Ms Maya Krishna Rao, director, performer and teacher, demonstrated how theatre could be used to lead children into an experience of life. Ms Rao, who helped create a drama syllabus for Classes One to Twelve (as part of a National Focus Group of NCF), said the aim of drama is to locate ourselves definitely in the world and this process of locating starts with looking at the school—its history and environment.

The arts editor and curator Mr Sadanand Menon turned a critical eye at the education system as a whole—a system that imparts blocks of knowledge and prevents a creative interaction with reality. Mr Menon believed that formal education was





often an obstruction in the way of learning, which excluded rather than included. The social scientist and philosopher of science Prof. Shiv Visvanathan adopted a typically radical approach to the Right to Education Bill by questioning the manner in which it used the word 'rights'. Human rights must be understood as an art form, whereas they are being understood as a means of putting productive forces back into the knowledge economy, he said. The Bill uses the word 'right' in a homogenous, official sense. How do we bring culture back into rights? How can we create a right to school when millions of Indians do not yet have a right to citizenship? A right, said Prof. Visvanathan, is subversive, dissenting, eccentric and plural. Is the right to free and compulsory education a right to the variety of knowledges available in this society, or is school a homogenisation of these cultures? Is it an attempt to pull some marginal groups into middle-class existence?

Ms Jyotsana Tiwari, Reader in Arts and Aesthetics at the NCERT, New Delhi, remarked that school learning was not connected to the outside world. Ms Tiwari, who has been involved in the framing of the NCF 2005, and in the review and

development of arts education syllabi for all stages of school education, said that the NCF 2005 recommends arts education as an evaluation-based curricular area, which should be compulsory up to the secondary classes. The goal should not be attaining perfection in the arts but supporting the child's own expression and style through exposure to material, skills and technique. Till Class Eight, the arts ought not to be taught as a separate subject but should help to cultivate self-expression. Mr Dhankar felt that even a curriculum that is jointly framed by educationists and citizens should be amply flexible and offer the possibility of interpretation at every stage. He was of the firm belief that the less legislation the better, in the matter of curriculum and pedagogy.

The conference was not all talk, though. The hands-on component was provided by breakout sessions that coaxed the participants out of their seats and got them exercising their bodies and their vocal cords. The founder of the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Mr Jayachandran Palazhy, and his trainers, demonstrated movement techniques that could be used in the classroom. With the same aim, Ms Alexandra Zach, a lecturer in music and dance

pedagogy living in Salzburg, combined music with body movements. The well-known poet Mr Gieve Patel and Mr Akshara K.V. of Ninasam jointly handled the language session, showing how poetry could be made enjoyable for students.

The closing session of the conference was devoted to evaluating Kali-Kalisku and the impact it has so far made in Karnataka. The starting point for the future, said Ms Anupama Prakash, who is a programme executive at IFA and has been coordinating the programme, would be based on the feedback from the participating teachers. Teachers from various districts in Karnataka—such as Mandya, Gulbarga, Bidar and Udupi—spoke about how Kali-Kalisku had impacted them.

In her closing speech, Dr Evelin Hust, Director Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore, said she felt that the success of Kali-Kalisku did not depend on numbers but on whether it could genuinely empower the teacher.

The significance of Kali-Kalisku and, indeed, of the entire conference, was best summed up by Mr Mallesha M. Pavagada, a teacher in the Government High School at Chalmatti village, Dharwad district, Karnataka, who said, “A school without the arts is like a place without water.”



*Kali-Kalisu:
Learning to Teach through Art*

Usha Rao

All photographs, by P.K. Ramesh, Ninasam,
show scenes from Kali-Kalisu workshops.



Throughout 2009, Kali-Kalisku, a joint initiative of the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) and the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore, fed the creative impulses of about 420 government school-teachers in Karnataka's villages and towns through a series of twenty arts pedagogy training workshops. The workshops were designed in collaboration with five partner organisations: Ananya GML Cultural Academy, Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi (BGVS), Gombe Mané (Puppet House) and Ninasam, all major arts institutions in Karnataka.

As a designated observer at some of the workshops, Usha Rao got a ringside view of the proceedings, and when she later visited some of the teachers on their home turf, she was able to see how they had put their learning into practice.

Currently, education at the school level centres mainly on memory-based learning and the retention of information. The experts tell us that so-called 'learning' is more than this. Perhaps the arts can open the window to learning that involves the senses and provides a child with the language and space to explore her immediate world and her relationship to it. This is crucial for all of us, and of course essential for children. After all, the passage through childhood is one of discovery of the world, of oneself and the ways in which the two are linked.

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In schools, exposure to the arts is not a priority in the same way that computer education would be, as it is assumed that the arts have a minimal role in preparing the young for life. At best, music, visual arts and theatre remain on the periphery, either as co-curricular activities or to serve as 'material' for cultural shows and competitions. It is only in the recent past that there has been a push by institutions such as the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the apex advisory body for education in India, to take a serious look at the role of the arts in education, and by extension, its place in the lives of the young. The position paper of the NCERT in 2006 makes a

compelling argument to integrate arts education into the curriculum at all levels in school as a way of ensuring against future "cultural illiteracy" and loss of "cultural identity in all its diversity and richness". The arts, it argues, are a part of the cultural substratum from which a child forges a connection between herself and her world, and thereby establishes a sense of self and identity.

If the arts are to be taken to classrooms, teachers have to play a catalytic role in making it a reality. However, as individuals and educators, they have minimal exposure or access to arts and arts pedagogies, be they classical or local/folk forms. The former are often inaccessible in a rural milieu and are sometimes perceived to be so because of their association with 'high culture' and dominant class/caste groups. A local form of art sometimes carries the tag of a 'backward' cultural identity, which makes it problematic for many to have a live relationship with it.



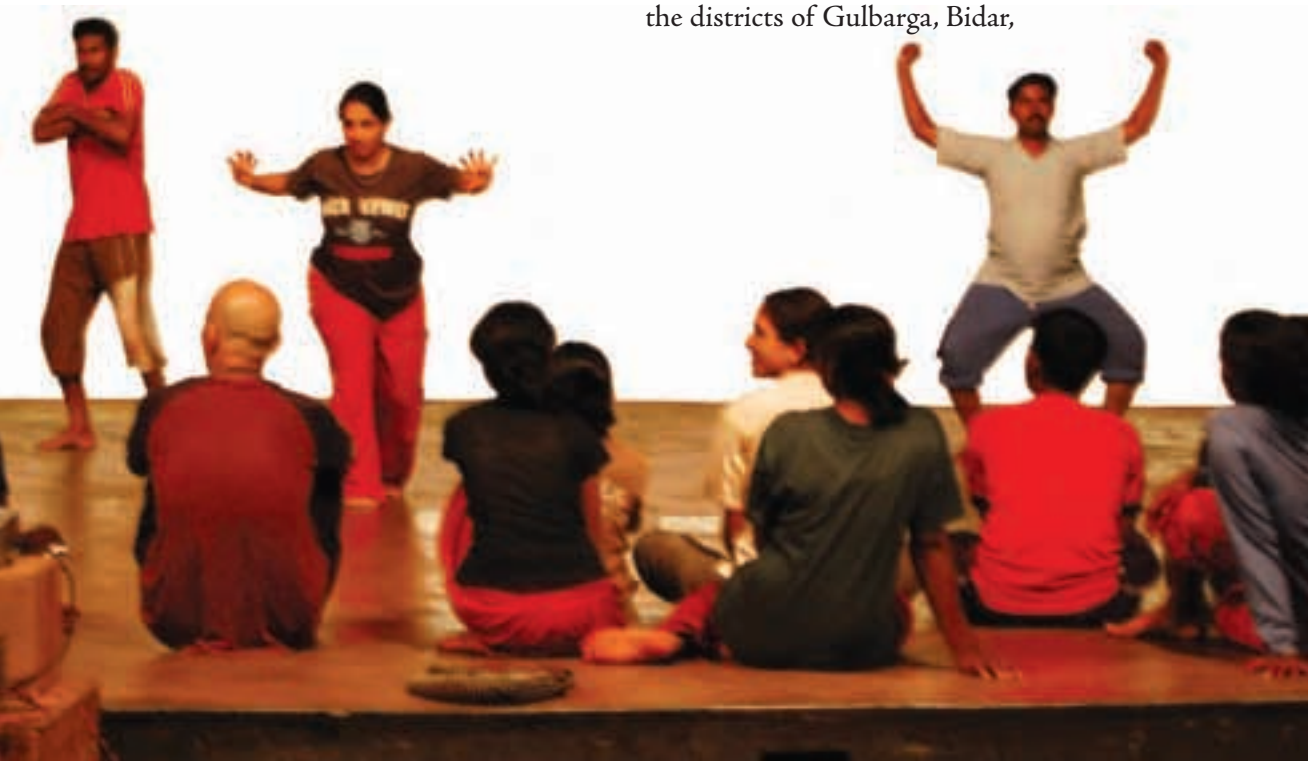
Mr Prakash Garud of Gombe Mané, who has done extensive work in puppetry with teachers and teacher trainees, comments that often, cultural performances in schools are poor copies of commercial entertainment as teachers are not aware of other forms of artistic expression.

These concerns form the backdrop for the Kali-Kalasu intervention of the Goethe-Institut Bangalore and IFA. It is grassroots in its approach as it works with government schoolteachers in Karnataka. The programme intends to kindle a connection with the arts for the teacher, both as an 'individual' and as an 'educator', through exposure to music, movement, theatre, visual arts and puppetry. As the idea is not to create 'experts' in any one discipline

but to provide a range of experiences, Kali-Kalasu uses an interdisciplinary approach where teachers are exposed to two or more art forms in two- or three-day modules. The approach and design has drawn on the strengths of five partner organisations

(Attakkalari, Ananya, BGVS, Gombe Mané and Ninasam) all of whom have worked extensively in their respective arenas—movement, (south Indian classical) Carnatic music, visual arts, puppetry and theatre—and have a shared concern to bring these arts into mainstream education.

As an observer I followed the workshops from the inaugural session (that had all five modules spread over fifteen days) at Ninasam (Shimoga district) to the shorter workshops in the districts of Gulbarga, Bidar,



Udupi, and Kodagu/Coorg. What transpired was a complex and dynamic process that unfolded in the course of the interaction between teachers and facilitators, not all of which can be captured within the confines of this article.

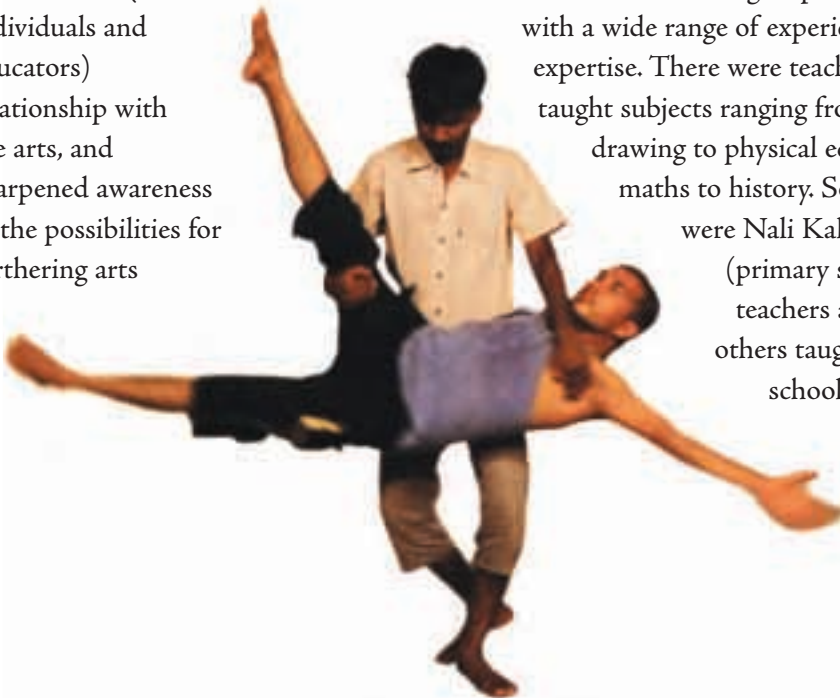
Responses of teachers to Kali-Kalisu emerged through extensive conversations with individual participants and facilitators, some of which were carried on in the post-workshop period. Visits to a few schools in Sadem (Gulbarga district), Shettikere (Shimoga district), Udupi town, and two schools in Kodagu district familiarised us with the teachers' home turfs and their students, who are ultimately the *raison d'être* of this initiative. At a broader level, the fallouts have been insights into teachers' (as individuals and educators) relationship with the arts, and sharpened awareness of the possibilities for furthering arts

education interventions within this constituency.

On the Road with Kali Kalisu

The journey with Kali-Kalisu began in May 2009 at Ninasam, Heggodu (a premier theatre institute and hub of literary and cultural discourse in Karnataka), and moved through government schools spread over the four coordinates of the state, in the district towns of Dharwad, Gulbarga, Bidar, Mandya, Udupi and Kodagu districts.

The first workshop, which was exclusively for drama teachers, had a group of young teachers (of both sexes), the majority of who were freshly appointed to rural high schools. The subsequent workshops were run for a mixed group of teachers with a wide range of experience and expertise. There were teachers who taught subjects ranging from drawing to physical education, maths to history. Some were Nali Kali (primary school) teachers and others taught high school. Senior



teachers who were primarily resource people were also present.

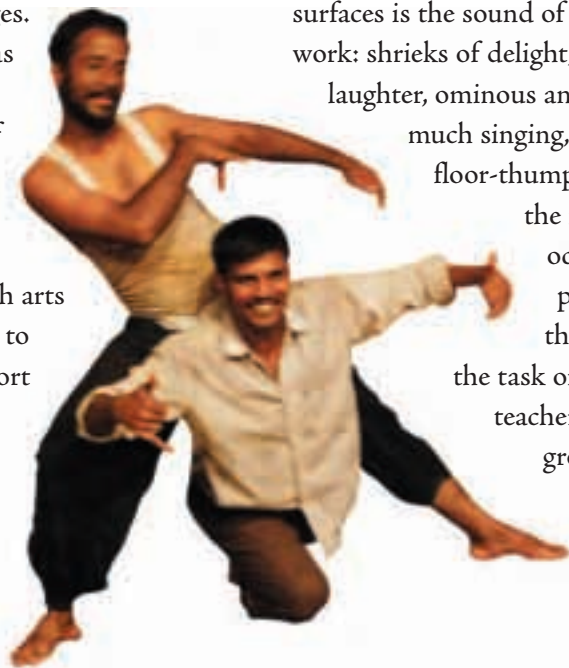
Some teachers demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the cultural, economic and political contexts of their work and lives, and those of their students. They also seemed sensitive to the challenges their students face in terms of consolidating a positive sense of self in the face of material deprivation and a socio-cultural scenario that values urban and 'global' markers of identity. As with most other groups, there were hints of cleavages that emerged in the course of group interactions, primarily along gender and ethnic/religious lines. However, by and large there was a cohesive energy by virtue of their shared experience of working within the milieu of the rural school and facing its inherent challenges.

The canvas was wide and evolved through a process of interaction with partners and was shaped by the possibilities that each arts practice had to offer to teachers within a short time frame. At the heart of it was the conviction that the

arts is not about 'talent' or accomplishment, but a medium through which we can begin to explore a connection with oneself and the world. Core concepts of the particular art form were translated into hands-on sessions wherever possible. Teachers had the opportunity to learn the basics of the form, experience pedagogies related to it, and express their own creativity through 'play' and experimentation. Through this they also became aware of the potential it could have in their classroom.

I watched as teachers discovered the thrill of movement and the language of puppetry or played with waste material to create art. Some of them made their acquaintance with classical music and others crafted short performance pieces at even shorter notice. The impression that surfaces is the sound of teachers at work: shrieks of delight, thunderous

laughter, ominous animal sounds, much singing, clapping and floor-thumping —with the facilitator occasionally and politely urging them to finish the task on time. Senior teachers rolled on the ground, giggling helplessly as





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they went through the Attrakkalari exercises. Young Urdu medium teachers from Bidar, many of whom had never faced an audience in their lives, were thrilled to play their roles in the puppet show. Everybody loved the chance to grab the mike and sing. As I watched this spontaneous flow, I couldn't help but wonder what it would take for this sense of play to be 'beamed over' to schoolrooms.

What they said

Teachers were extremely appreciative of the whole experience. However, individuals related differently to various aspects of the workshops. On the one hand there were those who were precise in listing skills and approaches that they thought were 'useful' in the classroom. There were others who felt that the entire process itself was

immensely 'helpful' in a broad sense as it exposed them to new experiences with the arts and suggested new possibilities. Some felt it would form the inner resource cache that they could draw on at appropriate moments.

'What' can we teach?

There seems to be a tacit understanding across the board that workshops ought to have an impact on *what* is taught in the classroom. The immediate response of teachers was to name all the new skills and approaches that they thought would be applicable or replicable in the classroom. Somewhere at the top of the long list are the tips they got from BGVS to make a class colourful, participative and relevant: mud painting, collage with dried

leaves, techniques for displaying children's work, etc. Learning to make 'nectar out of waste' (the facilitators' reference to extracting creative mileage out of waste and locally available material) gave teachers a window out of the material constraints they face. Before the display charts were carted away by the lucky few, images were safely captured in mobile phones by the rest.

The puppetry module (by Gombe Mané) appealed across the board because the teachers saw in it potential for designing lessons that could appeal to a child's sensibilities. The safe performance space it offered behind the curtain could be capitalised on, they felt, to draw out the diffident child and boost her self-

confidence. The theatre games in the Ninasam module too, they felt, could help adolescent children become more articulate and less awkward with each other. As many teachers work within confined spaces that are generally not conducive to free movement, Attakkalari's site-specific movement work ('limited palette' which develops movement around available spaces) seemed like a practical tool. The classical music session (by Ananya) was appreciated by many teachers who did not have exposure or access to this form. Demonstrations of rhythm and the possibility of infusing rhythm and

melody into text were eagerly absorbed by many, especially those who work with younger age groups.

"If we learn something and enjoy it and we can't pass it on to children, then it is a waste," says an experienced science teacher (from Bidar district) while presenting highlights from a session to her cohorts. She is not the sole voice to express this view. Many like her read an immediate connection between the 'Kali' (learn) and 'Kalisku' (teach). At certain moments in the workshop, the anxiety to translate their experience into



performance in the classroom ran high. Sometimes it expressed itself as frustration when, for instance, they were not quite clear as to how they could use a movement module in class or felt that they had not understood the art of puppet-making well enough to train children.

'How' can we teach?

Once the subject of tools, techniques and application was out of the way, the conversation turned to the 'hows' of teaching, i.e. the quality of interaction, pedagogic tools and approaches that they had encountered in the workshop. "We learned not only from what they taught but **how** they taught," observed a young drama teacher. Facilitators elicited and used inputs from participants as the foundation for the content of their modules. "They taught us by involving us and our experience. It is something that I would like to bring to my

students," commented another teacher at the end of the workshop. Involving students in the process of teaching and learning was something that they wished to emulate in the classroom.

Another aspect of arts pedagogy that touched teachers was the manner in which facilitators gradually layered appropriate skills and tools in order to move towards a goal, whether it was simple choreography, the writing of a poem or the making of a collage. At the end of the workshop, there were some teachers who recognised it as an approach that they could attempt to practise. Democratic processes in the classroom that included participants and 'respected' them were highly appreciated and acknowledged as the ideal to be employed, regardless of what is taught.

The teacher—the individual

One of the visions of this workshop was to 'invest' in the teacher and nurture her/his creative impulses. In the review session, many participants commented that this workshop was in fact individual-centred rather than information-centred. The space to reflect, explore their creative sides, tap into personal contexts and share experiences was what made the workshop distinctive.



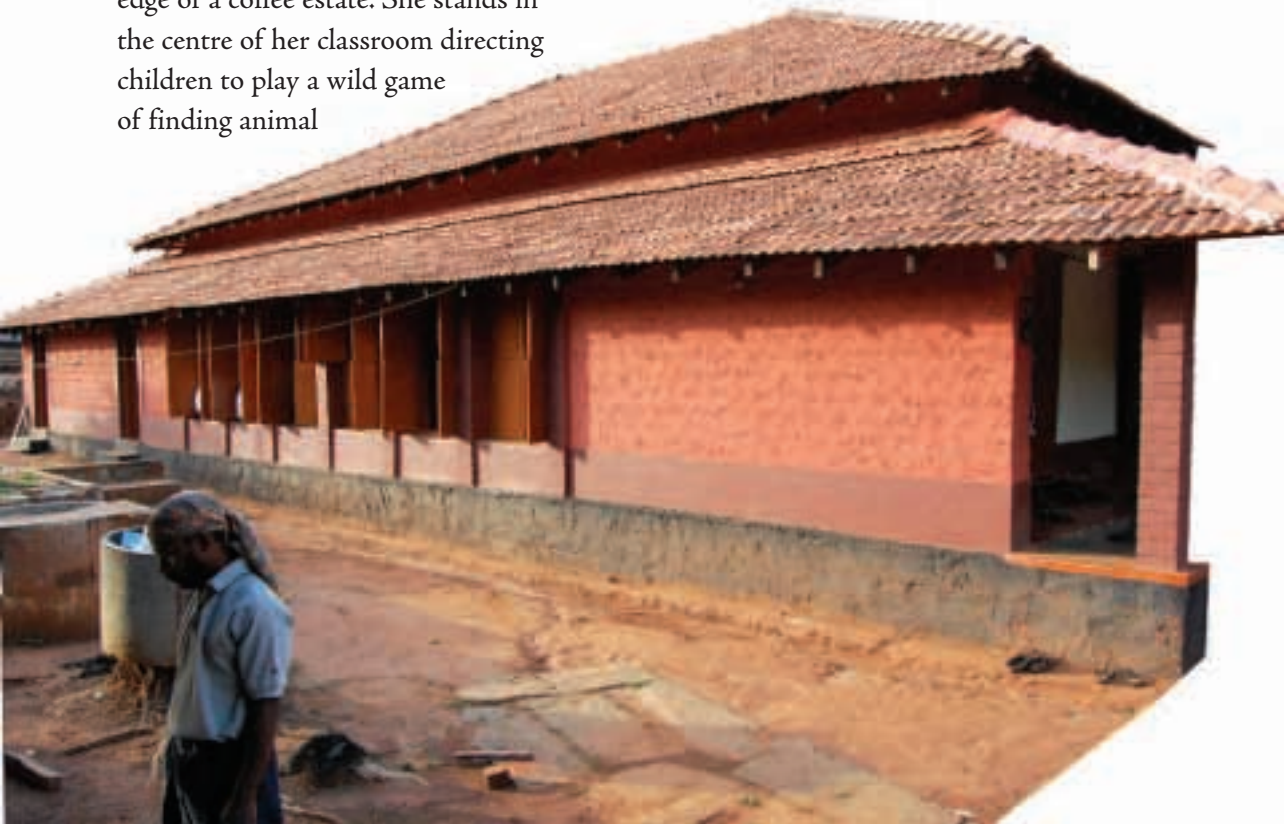
“When my CRP asked me to attend this workshop, I was afraid it would be more of the same,” said a young English teacher from Bidar district. However, she confessed on hindsight that she was glad to be there. Unlike other professional development programmes (which are no doubt essential and valuable) that equipped teachers with specific tools for lesson delivery, Kali-Kalisku, she felt, had a focus that encompassed the wider world of the teacher that could ultimately build a teacher’s approach as well as repertoire.

Ms Uma Devi’s Nali Kali room in Kakabe, Kodagu, offers a view of a large, green hill with purple clouds. This is an old primary school at the edge of a coffee estate. She stands in the centre of her classroom directing children to play a wild game of finding animal

partners. Later, in the corridor, she reflects on the workshop: *“This has taken me back to my childhood. We played, danced and felt free as individuals. It was unlike other training experiences which are all about syllabi and tools and techniques.”*

Appreciating the arts

One of the reasons for devaluing the arts is because it is seen as an activity that is lacking in method and ‘discipline’. For instance, many had the impression that contemporary dance was a set of random and ‘free’ movements. After being exposed to the structure and techniques that support it and the effort involved in



learning a so-called 'simple' movement, their perception shifted.

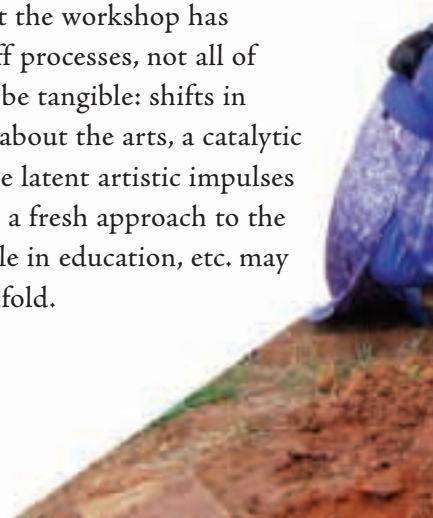
Kali-Kalisu, many felt, had provided the opportunity to recognise the potential of the arts as catalysts and enhancers in the classroom learning process. Perhaps this in itself is a significant outcome as the informed and appreciative teacher could potentially be an advocate for the arts in a school setting.

Through our journey with Kali-Kalisu, there was frequent mention of *pratibha karanji*, which is the annual talent competition held state-wide. Teachers are under tremendous pressure to 'perform' at these competitions as the prestige of the school, the village and the district are all at stake. Through the workshops, the programmes were criticised as being too 'filmi' and not relevant to the lives of children. In the post-workshop reviews, optimists felt that Kali-Kalisu would provide a novel point of reference for aesthetics in forthcoming cultural programmes. Teachers felt that their fresh perspectives would help them to conceive of a different kind of *pratibha karanji* presentation, both in terms of content and process. As one teacher put it, "Earlier we forced children to do as we say. I think now I will try to use the children's own ideas, experience and talents."

SPIN-OFFS

Investing in the Teacher

In the course of conversations and our school visits, it became apparent that teachers face multiple blocks at work either due to a lack of infrastructure or of a supportive environment, or a combination of both. At times, even the most dynamic of teachers may have to face hurdles in her attempt to bring in something 'new'. For instance, Ms Gayathri B.S., a maths teacher from Udupi, confessed that she came back from the workshop full of zest to try new approaches in her work but found it dampened by the lack of support from peers. Therefore it is difficult to project the outcome (in this limited sense) as there are many factors that have to come together for a perceptible change to occur in the classroom. However, the value of this workshop does not lie primarily in its 'applicability' in some direct sense. Discussions with participants suggest that the workshop has triggered off processes, not all of which may be tangible: shifts in perception about the arts, a catalytic effect on the latent artistic impulses of teachers, a fresh approach to the teacher's role in education, etc. may begin to unfold.



Some teachers saw the workshop as a window to view possibilities for self-development (as individuals and as educators). They felt that they needed to take the initiative to build on what they had learned and experienced. In this context the 'learning' and 'teaching' were not bound in an immediate relationship but punctuated with a space for exploration and internalisation.

Facilitators

One of the significant spin-offs of the Kali-Kalisku initiative is that it facilitated the coming together of art practitioners who otherwise function in separate spheres. Although all of them have an independent

involvement with similar constituencies, the Kali-Kalisku programme provided a platform for discovering possible linkages and forging partnerships. For instance, the possibility of a mutual relationship between a theatre institute (Ninasam) and a contemporary movement academy (Attakkalari) suggested itself in the course of this particular initiative.

The workshops have also had a transformative effect on facilitators who have been intensely involved in them. Some of them felt that they had understood the art of teaching and communicating better. One of them mentioned that he has now become aware of dynamics that either enable or disrupt the learning flow of the classroom. For the young Ananya



facilitators, the challenge was to demystify a form of classical music both for themselves and others. This perhaps has brought into focus their own relationship with their art.

There is a possibility that for arts practitioners and for IFA, interactions with teachers from across the state could perform the role of an 'arts barometer' to gauge the level of exposure to local art forms and response to the arts in general. This may inform their strategies for working with communities in the future.

Looking Ahead

This was the beginning of what maybe a sustained engagement with arts education. The first phase of workshops points to some areas that may need bolstering and fine-tuning.

Capacity-Building

At the heart of Kali-Kalisu are its facilitators. They have designed and executed a learning experience that has been overwhelmingly appreciated. In order to enable facilitators to iron out the hiccoughs they might have faced and to refine their approach, a set of capacity-building exercises need to be designed, in collaboration with them.

Collaboration

Partners may explore the possibility of enhancing the interdisciplinary approach of the workshop. They might also explore dovetailing the inputs of their modules in order to avoid repetitions (such as ice-breakers at the beginning of every module) or forge possible linkages between modules (as was demonstrated when the poetry session of Ninasam was built on in the choreography session by Attakkalari).

Content and design

Conversations with the facilitators suggest that the three-day format (for each art form) is inadequate, if it is to be the sole exposure for teachers. Instead they have suggested that a series of modules be designed to build familiarity with the art form in





stages. For instance, Ninasam feels that the theatre module needs to build a context for contemporary theatre as exposure to this form is low especially among most rural government schoolteachers. Ananya recommends various levels of listening/appreciation experiences for the 'uninitiated' teacher, so that there is a graded appreciation of music. It was suggested that the teacher be given listening and text material which s/he could share with students.

Attakkalari proposed the idea of a 'suitcase show' which would entail a series of travelling movement performances that could be done locally (in the districts) for a group of host schools. This they felt would enhance an appreciation of contemporary movement arts. Gombe Mané suggests that the short modules

be followed up by specific skill-building workshops that would give teachers the techniques to bring puppetry into the classroom. BGVS feels that their approach needs to be modified to suit high school teachers in particular as their inputs are generally tailored for primary-level teachers.

Skills or Experience?

Modules are intended to provide an experience of a certain art form and its pedagogies, all within a duration of two or three days. However, some of these modules seem to be moving towards a content that is skill-based and application-oriented. Given that two or three days are insufficient for creating competencies that can be used with confidence by teachers, there could be a danger of developing modules which neither provide a feel and experience of the art form, nor develop skills that can be applied with confidence.

Primarily, teachers see themselves as skills horses who are mandated to absorb tools and skills in the programme that they are deputed to attend. Therefore, this is the expectation that they bring to the workshop. Past experience of professional training reinforces this

expectation, as most sessions are based on syllabi and teaching methods that can be transferred to the classroom. In the context of arts education, the tendency is to view the experience of the arts through this direct utilitarian lens, which perhaps moves away from the intent of Kali-Kalisu. This expectation of teachers can also end up placing on facilitators a demand for more application-oriented modules. Perhaps a gentle reminder about the broad intent of Kali-Kalisu might lighten the teacher's anxiety about 'learning' to some extent and allow him/her to experience the sessions with a little more freedom. The review has revealed that those teachers who have accepted the workshop as an investment in the individual have been able to imbibe the experience in a

'tension-free' atmosphere. Teachers who have been inspired to learn have also expressed the desire to make positive shifts in classroom interaction.

There were moments in the workshops that flowed smoothly along the confluence between skill-building and experience, giving participants a feel for the possibilities of the art form while also building a set of approaches and tools. The BGVS activity that introduced teachers to local soils as potential painting media, the site-specific group performance in which the Attakkalari module (in Kodagu) culminated, and the poem-building exercise of Ninasam were some instances among others that demonstrated this possibility.



Partnering local art/artists

There was a great deal of diversity in the level of familiarity that teachers had with local performance forms (dance, music and theatrical forms). There were a few who had made the effort to become aware of folk forms that exist in their students' lives. In Udupi, teachers (men and women) were well versed in Yakshagana (the dominant performing art form in the region) and broke into steps and song at every possible opportunity with great joy and confidence. This image was completely inverted in Gulbarga where teachers claimed to have no knowledge of local musical and dance forms, despite the variety and richness present in North Karnataka. They seemed to be most familiar with idioms from 'filmi' styles of dance and music. This in itself is an interesting contrast but does not suggest facile conclusions. It needs to be studied and understood from multiple perspectives. The crucial question to ask is whether our vision of an arts education initiative could have the space to facilitate an interaction between teachers and local art forms in order to enhance familiarity, augment repertoires and suggest new possibilities for working with children. By collaborating with



local artists, can they begin to re-look at their relationship with local art forms?

Kali-Kalisku could explore the possibility of linking with arts practitioners. These may be folk or contemporary artists who could help to root art initiatives within the teachers' immediate communities by engaging dynamically with them over a period of time. The partnership may infuse these forms with a fresh energy and revitalise them. This is not to suggest that local arts should be the sole elements of the workshop. The excitement in exploring something

that is new and 'alien' (such as contemporary movement for instance) could be exhilarating and is worth encouraging, as the first phase has demonstrated.

Networks

Teachers have expressed their frustration with school environments that are not always conducive to trying new ways of being with children. Classroom practices in some environments seem to be regimented. Importantly, teachers do not feel empowered to try something 'different'. One way of tackling this block could

be to facilitate the formation of informal networks among teachers from an area or district. Sharing of information, resources and ideas might keep alive their enthusiasm and trigger new lines of enquiry into their relationship with education.

Afterword

Looking back at the programme in its entirety, there can be no mistaking the overwhelmingly positive response it has received from participants. Facilitators, for their part, have been struck by the ease with which teachers, with no prior



exposure to the arts, have been able to enter its unfamiliar waters.

Learning, as we are aware, is a complex process. Changes in perspective and ‘behaviour’ are propelled by multiple processes—both internal to the person as well as external to him/her (environment or community). Therefore, it is hard to predict what might be the long-term outcome of such an intervention.

Perhaps a positive learning experience in itself, even if it is to be the only one in a teacher’s life, can serve as an ‘ah-ha’ moment that has a transient but transformative effect on her. It might swirl as a memory haze to be tapped into consciously or otherwise, like Wordsworth’s daffodils waiting to ‘flash upon that inward eye.’ Teachers themselves cannot clearly state the specific ways in which this might happen. Part of my interaction with teachers involved the pursuit of ‘hard facts’ about how they perceived the programme and its place in their lives. After much discussion, Ms Pragyna Hegde, a young woman who teaches drama in Mantagi village, Haveri district, remarked that the programme was of no use to her in terms of application in the classroom. The experience as a whole, she said, was exciting for her as a person. It appeared to be an ‘ideal’ learning

situation that in her view may not be replicable. “*Given where and how I work, there is no way in which I can use many of these techniques with my children,*” she stated.

However, some of the aspects of this experience, for instance the care with which faculty designed their modules, and the attention given to inclusive classroom processes, she felt, have made their mark on her. She concludes the conversation with conviction: “*Kali-Kalisku has the quality of a deep memory, a dream, from which something would show itself in my life with children without me necessarily being aware of it.*”

Our Partners

Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts

Attakkalari is a Bangalore-based movement and digital arts institution which is committed to developing contexts for contemporary cultural expressions. It is home to a thriving dance repertory company, which performs full-length multimedia presentations all over the world. Attakkalari is equally committed to formal and non-formal dance education and is actively engaged in arts education outreach in schools.

Ananya GML Cultural Academy

Ananya is dedicated to nurturing, promoting and propagating Indian music, dance and other arts. It occupies a prominent place in the cultural landscape of Bangalore, with its vast library of books and recorded music, and the regular and frequent concerts and performances it organises. Ananya has a special interest in spreading the appreciation of Carnatic classical music among young people.

Sri Nilakanteshwara Natya Seva Sangha (Ninasam)

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A multi-faceted institution, Ninasam, based in the village of Heggodu, embraces arts and culture in a variety of forms. Although it is primarily known as a theatre institute and theatre repertory company, Ninasam also has roots in cinema, literature and community-based cultural activism. Ninasam is widely regarded as a centre for vibrant cultural discourse and activism, and an arena in which local and global concerns are in perennial dialogue. Ninasam hopes to catalyse widespread cultural sensitisation through arts education initiatives like Kali-Kalisku.

Gombe Mané (Puppet House)

Gombe Mané is a Dharwad-based theatre and puppetry institution with a keen interest in education. Training teachers in arts pedagogies is a central part of their work. Gombe Mané inherits from traditional and pre-modern theatre and puppetry forms of North Karnataka as well as precepts from contemporary theatre institutions. Gombe Mané is committed to various aspects of social activism through its artistic endeavours. Quality education is one of their goals.

Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi (BGVS)

BGVS was started under the National Literacy Mission and in the past decade has developed a focus on improving the quality of primary education in the country. While science and the scientific temper were its pillars to begin with, a more holistic understanding of quality education has now become its central vision. Arts-in-Education, and context-sensitive visual arts training in particular, has become an important module in BGVS's teacher training programmes, which are predominantly in rural areas.



A Preamble to an Educational Drama

Shiv Visvanathan

The Right to Education Bill was avidly discussed at the Arts Education Conference, and while most participants examined the ways in which it could be rendered most effective, Shiv Visvanathan turned his attention to the roots of its key words: ‘child’, ‘right’ and ‘school’. In this essay, which expands on his talk at the conference, he argues for the need to liberate ‘right’ from its arid prison of officialdom and place it in a living, sensory semiosphere. A polysemous right to compulsory school education is a right to one’s culture, ecologies, and the memories of one’s society, he says. The school must mediate between the diversity of cultures.

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I

The dramas we produce in our daily lives mimic larger battles. Let me consider this seminar as theatre. On one side stands a text, a bill, a piece of legislation. Accompanying it are some of the *munshis* of the message: educationists and sociologists who have pioneered and piloted this bill. They provide the prose of the act.

Playing the chorus as critique is a whole circle of artists, playwrights, puppeteers and dancers. As one juxtaposes the two, the bill as text and context, one sees a battle between the

Panopticon and the Playhouse. What else does one see? A Bill from a state creating a right to compulsory education. A Bill conscious of its roots in bureaucracy and a political economy, more keen to fight corruption than celebrate education. There are three key words in it: *right*, *child* and *school*.

All three key words are within a matrix of political economy. It is almost as if the school is the beginning of a new dismal science—the dismal science of education.

But there is hope. Standing on the other side are the tricksters of culture: dancers, magicians and actors. Can they twist the script, translate it

in other ways? Can 'right', 'childhood' and 'school' be converted to an art form? What does this mean? Can we supplement the legalism of 'right', which often turns the school into an enclosure, with the wider dynamism of the commons and the community? Distorting Tolstoy, wise as he was, but crabby too, can we impudently say that unhappy schools are all alike in their correctness; happy schools are each different in their own way?

II

I think my argument involves five simple things: Firstly, we need a theatre that turns 'right' into an art form.

We move the word 'right' from its officialdom in citizenship to the dreams of language. A right no longer belongs to *Homo Juridicus*. A right is not a word with official definitions pegged to official careers. Once we go beyond legality and official definitions, a right is not a clerical word; it is a living-ness, a link between word and world. Unless a right belongs to a *sensorium* and a *semiosphere*, it is only an arid bureaucratic term. A Macaulayism from a Public Works Department state.

To bring rights into a *semiosphere*, one has to move it out of officialdom to a place where it is a part of

A Cosmos

A Constitution

A Syllabus

A Commons

A Community

Unless a right as a travelling fact traverses these five theatres, the new drama of rights cannot even begin.

A polysemous right to education redefines childhood because rights homogenise to guarantee equality. But rights have to pluralise to ensure diversity. Let me explain through an analogy.

The cultural critic Zia ud din Sardar, a Pakistani living in Britain, once talked of the rights to health. He said that my right to health is a right to my systems of healing. That means the right to health is the right to alternative imaginations, alternative systems of healing, pain, death, cure, therapy and dying. A right to compulsory school education is a right to culture, ecologies, the memories of one's society. One cannot first create a de-cultured school and then create the compensatory cultures of an arts education. A polysemous right guarantees the arts and ecologies of one's childhood.

A right to compulsory school education is a right to culture, ecologies, the memories of one's society. One cannot first create a de-cultured school and then create the compensatory cultures of an arts education.

III

To recover and re-read rights we have to explore language. Language is being. Each word and the world it creates, adds to the diversity of what is. There is an obscenity to language when it is treated instrumentally. A language is not a lathe or a hammer. The linguistic survey and the census exhaust only the administrative sense of being. To use Martin Heidegger's words, language is a 'dwelling', a form of life. This much we wish to make clear before we begin, because protest cannot be the pretext of this meeting. Beyond variance and diversity, language provides a rationale for a different kind of being. The history of language has been the history of its dominant metaphors. These metaphors virtually became modes of governance, filters through which language was perceived. Two images, in particular, have dominated the

linguistic narratives of Western thought. Both were obsessive dreams of order—The Babel and the Panopticon.

The Babel is the biblical myth of a society condemned to anarchy, disorder and misunderstanding. It is a litany of the disorder that diversity creates. It is the feeling that too many languages and dialects make society impossible. Babel epitomises the curse of diversity, of language as noise.

The biblical idea of diversity as disorder is carried over by the colonial regime. Standardisation becomes a tool of imperialism. Confronted by the anarchy of languages, Lord Macaulay and George Trevalyn summon the idea of Babel and see the imposition of English as a resolution of the anarchy of 'native languages'. To create an official filariat mimicking the British was the dream of colonial rule.

The Babel sets the stage for the Panopticon. It is the vision of the all-seeing eye created by the philosophy

Modern democracy perpetuated the ideas of print and the nation, virtually creating a war between the oral and the literate, denying to the former their perceptions of reality.

of Jeremy Bentham. The Panopticon was visualised as a supervisory organisation where the authority of the eye creates a surveillance system, a vision of order, which controls the marginals, the poor, the orphans, and the madmen, forcing them into the logic of industrial discipline. The modern school, the factory and the prison, all smell of the logic of the Panopticon.

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Panopticonising language begins with grammar. Language was a lived, expressive reality before grammar standardised it in printed form. Vernacular lost out to the printed word, and reading aloud became suspect. To quote Illich, "To read and play a musical instrument were perceived as parallel activities. The current single-minded internationally accepted definition of literacy obscured an alternative approach to bookprint and reading." People conversant with vernacular literature were seen as those who did not read or write. The battle between oral and written civilisations has been the

greatest class war in history. The transition from vernacular to an officially taught mother tongue is a cultural destruction whose story still remains to be fully told.

The search for the *perfect language* was merely a variant of the will to the panopticon. Like the search for *perpetual machines*, it was a futile exercise.

The war against subsistence and the war against *vernacular* have much in common. It is a war against knowledge as dialect. In fact, as Mahasweta Devi once hinted, corruption is the ransom an oral society paid to the society of the text. Writing about bonded labour, she said that in an oral society, a word was a bond. But when the tribal entered the written world, the word as bond became a world of bondage as demonstrated by bonded labour.

Modern democracy perpetuated the ideas of print and the nation, virtually creating a war between the oral and the literate, denying to the former their perceptions of reality. As

a textual world democracy denies citizenship to the world of dialects and creates an informal economy out of them, subservient to the officialdom of language. Vernacular lives, vernacular livelihoods and vernacular languages were openly or tacitly ignored in modern democracies. This is the genocidal imperative present in the creation myth of democracy.

Oddly, a different view of language can redeem our current democracy with its obsession with science, textuality and the individual. We are meeting today to create not just a celebration of language but also the birth of a new constitutionality.

The march of the languages is the new Dandi March against the imperialism of the official, the standardised, the artificial and the genocidal, of democracy as mask disfiguring the face of a more authentic citizenship.

It is in this context that one must talk of the *sensorium* and the *semiosphere*. The *sensorium* is language embedded in the senses of the body. The language of the body has to be

embedded in a body of language. To over-determine a sense is to lose a cultural possibility. Enlightenment, by privileging visuality, lost the world of touch and smell. Once language reclaims the *sensorium* it has to talk of rights to a *semiosphere*. The idea of the *semiosphere* reclaims the entire symbolic universe: the myths, the rituals, the images and icons of the world. The *semiosphere* is the last commons and we claim it on behalf of language and education.

The symbol is our legacy, our guarantee of a future. A symbolic world cannot be reduced to the behaviouristic. A symbolic universe protects a variety of ideas of the body, the plurality of sound. Theatre, Music, Art and Storytelling are merely forms of symbolic accountancy. They plumb the secret registers of the mind, reflecting its deeper codes.

Let us emphasise that what we propose to offer is the idea of the *tacit constitution*. The *tacit constitution* stems from the world of body and life. It is not formal but articulated out of the informality of life. It lacks a

The tacit constitution stems from the world of body and life. It is not formal but articulated out of the informality of life.

standard narrative and contains only a plurality of stories that often make the same point orally. The tacit constitution weaves the orality of life, the dialects and vernacular into a text and pre-text for the written constitution. We do not challenge the constitution. We merely add to it notes on the constitution of the constitution that creates citizenship is full of *missing persons* and their dialects. The loss of persons is met with the emphasis on the individual. But the 'individual' is an aberration of language in as much as he is constituted monadically, atomistically and reductively.

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Every man is a ganglion of connections. This much language tells us. Every word or phoneme connects to a matrix of other words. Meaning does not derive solely from official definitions and dictionaries. The language or meaning of the word is its meaning in use. Meaning and identity shift with context. So, meaning is the sum total of contacts and connections. When an individual is embedded in a context of meanings, he cannot be read as an atom. This way he loses valency. Human rights become an add-on to an individual who has lost personhood. When democracy ignores language, citizenship becomes a compensatory act of add-ons.

IV

The new idea of rights demands a new social contract that challenges the old classifications of arts and sciences, and the evolutionary grid of tribal, peasant and industrial, and the oral, textual and digital.

The Right to Education Bill should not turn ironic in its destruction of cultures. The school has to mediate between this diversity of cultures. Otherwise, a right to education will be an oxymoron for the future.

It is in this context that the Bill must be seen within the neighbourhood of other reports and legislations: the reports on Nomadic and Denotified Tribes, the report on the Informal Sector, the Knowledge Commission Report, the Right to Information Bill. What one needs is the gossip of interaction. What one misses is the conversation of public spaces. The report, which should be a ganglion of legislations, is seen in too modular and isolated a form.

This creates a wonderful set of possibilities. The Indian Constitution is one of the rare constitutions that have both a section on Individual Rights and Directive Principles. What I am suggesting as an exercise is that culture and the arts respond to

economics by recreating this section of the constitution. It is a rag-bag of old isms. We need to replace this patchwork quilt of ideologies with an argument for diversity. Liberty and equality need to confront diversity as script and performance; without this *jugalbandi*, culture becomes recessive and the arts secondary. It becomes a bit like management theory where production as Taylorism dominates and the Human Relations school acts as a softener. The arts must do more than soften culture; they must re-write its grammar.

I am not proposing a shopping list of demands or a wish list of dreams but a kaleidoscope of possibilities where law as right listens to art. It is an attempt to see legislation as the tragicomic drama it is. What I am suggesting is the use of what (the Greek philosopher) Cornelius Castoriadis called the imaginary.

The imaginary is a horizon. It is an amniotic soup of words, dreams, desires and inventions within which reality reworks itself. For instance, the key words of today—Right, Culture, Multiculturalism, Gender, Growth—are dull indicators assembled in UNDP and Millennium documents that have turned dreams into registers. Registers do not have an unconscious,

or horizons where one mediates between the real, the probable, the possible, the utopian and the impossible. The wider canvas is tacit. Reality in legislation operates like miniature efforts within the wider dreams of the possible. One needs new dreams of language, colour, body and justice to rework the lassitude, the entropy of current words which are simultaneously repressed, protestant and dutiful. The insurrection of education as a dream of dialects and the vision of margins will not come without the *imaginary* inoculating the imagination as currently permissible thought.

V

In terms of a theory of language and the arts, democracy or any theory of the social is a collection of *negotiations*. We use the word with the density Jacques Derrida gave it.

A negotiation is a constant activity, a work of mediation, a ‘to and fro between patience and impatience’. Derrida calls it a knot and it evokes the *image* of the knot: “In the knot of negotiation different rhythms, different forces, different vibrations of time and rhythm exist.” Democracy like negotiation is a rope with an undeterminable number of wires

If democracy is a negotiation of difference, often located in dialects and the dialects of difference, standardisation becomes a monstrosity, a violation of play.

moving or quivering with different speeds and intensities.

If democracy is a negotiation of difference, often located in dialects and the dialects of difference, standardisation becomes a monstrosity, a violation of play. In a playful sense, *translation* is fundamental to an act of democracy.

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In recognising difference, *I translate, therefore we are*. Difference is sustained while meaning is communicated. Translation becomes an ethical ontological act and *multilingualism* is often an essential for democracy. It is not voice alone that is critical; it is man as a multiplicity of voices. For truth to be 'true' it has to be sounded in two languages. Between translation and hospitality a more ebullient theory of democracy is born.

Diversity is now no longer a problem, but in a linguistic sense, is an ontic condition for democracy. Fraternity as a celebration of dialects and difference anchors liberty and equality. The latter two when isolated

become restricted codes prone to official languages of standardisation and homogeneity. It is the restrictions of official language and citizenship that made the movement from early to late democracy so difficult. The polyphony of liberty, equality, fraternity became impoverished in the standardised vocabulary of citizenship. When the poetics of this tense triangle confronted the standardised prose of the second triangle, of productivity, efficiency and progress, a rift in language was created. Sustainability could not be the answer because it was monologic. It still carried the official thesaurus of efficiency. Democracy was driven by the languages of command and centralisation. One needed dialects, lost cultures of meaning, playful diversities of time to rescue sustainability. The informal and the vernacular are needed to restore its sense of play. Dictionary definitions of experts lacked the mythic power of the creation myth. The new tacit

constitutions had to create a polyphony around plurality, renewability and sustainability; all these had to be crafted in multiple time and in a multiplicity of dialects. The poverty of the official social contract lies in the fact that it evokes a rudimentary impoverished language.

One way of doing so is to rewrite the grammar of an agency like UNESCO. UNESCO has been captive to the classification of knowledge. Here, the arts have just extracted a concession of relevance; science still dominates the paradigm. By writing the UNESCO charter, one can rewrite the social contract between arts and science. A reworking of a theory of culture is a prelude to a right to education.

Claude Levi-Strauss in a five-decade-old article in the UNESCO Courier wrote of pity as a prelude to an understanding of culture. He used 'pity' in a post-modern sense shorn of its Christian piety. Pity, he said, is a feeling that the self is incomplete

without the other. It is an understanding that all others are a possibility of the self. Such an axiom allows no culture to capitalise itself and it is a refusal to museumise any other culture. Levi-Strauss' idea is critical today. Our ideas of development often sequentialise tribe, peasant, industrial and post-industrial possibilities.

The West could decimate the tribe, treating it as a feeble ancestor. That is genocide we cannot afford. We need to turn sequences into ultimate chains of being. Education in particular must challenge the vector of violence that modernity has become. The tribe and the nomad are our contemporaries. This much India has to see as its responsibility for the future. To deny this would be a failure of responsibility. Artists as legislators would then be as impotent as any development expert.

By writing the UNESCO charter, one can rewrite the social contract between arts and science. A reworking of a theory of culture is a prelude to a right to education.



Saying Goodbye to the Worksheet and the Colouring Book

Zakiya Kurrien

All photographs courtesy The Centre For Learning Resources

The Centre For Learning Resources (CLR) is a resource centre in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as well as elementary education. It acts as a technical support organisation providing training and materials to NGOs working at the grassroots level, and to government and private schools. It works primarily with teachers,



teacher-trainers, and others involved in the education of economically and socially disadvantaged children at the pre-primary and elementary stages of education, in school and out-of-school. It also works with trainers and field workers involved in the care and development of children in zero-to-three age group.

Zakiya Kurrien, Co-Director of CLR, provides a glimpse into the work her organisation does with children at Anganwadis (ECCE centres set up by the government of India), with an emphasis on the fruitful role that art can play in early childhood education.

CLAY PLAY: The children are given plain *mitti*, clay, and a theme around which they fashion objects.

Pre-school education is only one of three components of the government's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme that runs Anganwadis in villages and urban slums. The other two components, supplementary nutrition and health services, are better implemented, whereas the pre-school education component is either weak, or, in most cases, totally absent throughout the country.

56 One of the areas in which CLR has been working for more than two decades is the strengthening of preschool education in contexts such as the ICDS Anganwadi, the only channel for the education of disadvantaged three-to-five-year-olds. In a typical Anganwadi, budgets are abysmally low, space is limited, the light, poor, and the infrastructure, weak. The teacher is usually a local woman who would, at best, have passed the Class Ten exam, and have had only four to six days of government-run training; in certain areas, the teacher would be far less educated. We offer training programmes based on the preschool curriculum we have developed, an activity-based curriculum in which the

arts are not only integrated in areas such as Language Development but also receive a more overt focus in the area of 'creative activities'.

When you think of the arts, these are some of the words that come to mind: creativity, intuition, freedom, originality, flexibility, and aesthetics (which we define for teachers, at one level, as 'the appreciation of beauty'). And yet, even in the really well-equipped urban pre-schools, you do not always see arts education taking into account these concepts. For instance, you might see, on their bulletin boards, a template of a monkey's face, and there would be thirty such identical monkey faces pinned on the board—the so-called 'creative activity' of a class of primary school children. The colouring book, I feel, is a terrible danger during early childhood education. Worksheets are given, with readymade outlines, and the child has to colour them in. Right at the beginning, creativity is stifled because it is not really the child's own means of expression that are coming into play.

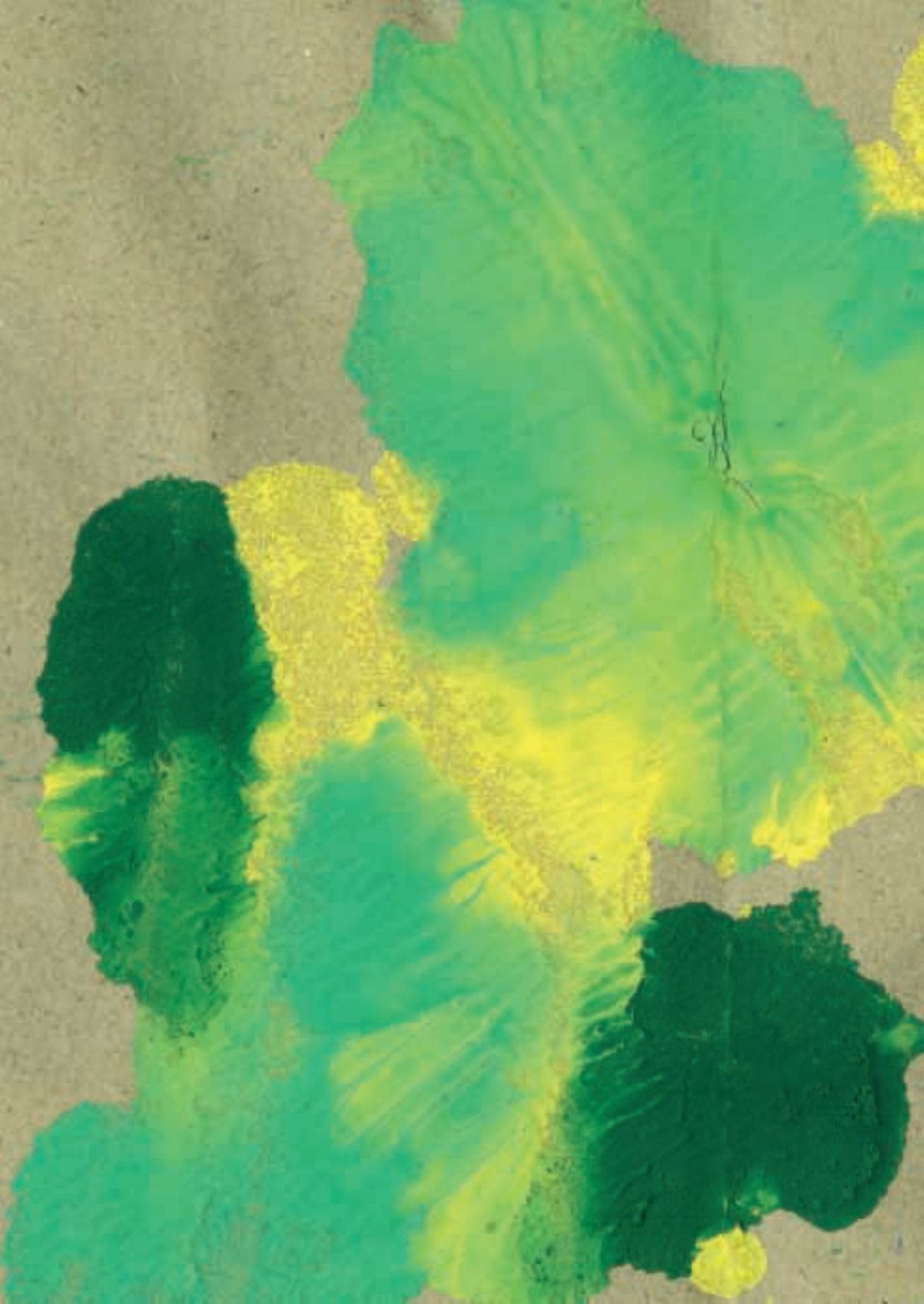
Our attempt in ICDS Anganwadis has been to train the local teacher, who operates on a very low

budget, to give preschoolers opportunities to convey their experiences through their art work. We want to get children from the poorest backgrounds to handle materials and get a sense of their individual creativity. We want all

stakeholders to appreciate what is possible in curriculum and teaching approaches on the lowest budgets. Here are some examples of the art that rural Anganwadi children have produced in some of our interventions:



DRAWING: According to the child who drew this, there is a water tank here, with a ladder leading up to it and water flowing.





PAINTING: Paint is dabbed on paper, which is then folded over, resulting in what looks like a Rorschach blot. The children are at the pre-literacy stage, an age when the symbolic and the representational come into play.

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MIRROR

PAINTING: There is no harm in using newspaper if one cannot afford even used paper. What matters is that the children get exposed to materials and get messy with paint.

TH
CV



PRINTING WITH HANDS: Paint is daubed on hands, which are then impressed on paper. "Look," says the child. "I made a butterfly." The teacher then draws the outline. The outline is never given first; the child tells the teacher what the picture means to her.





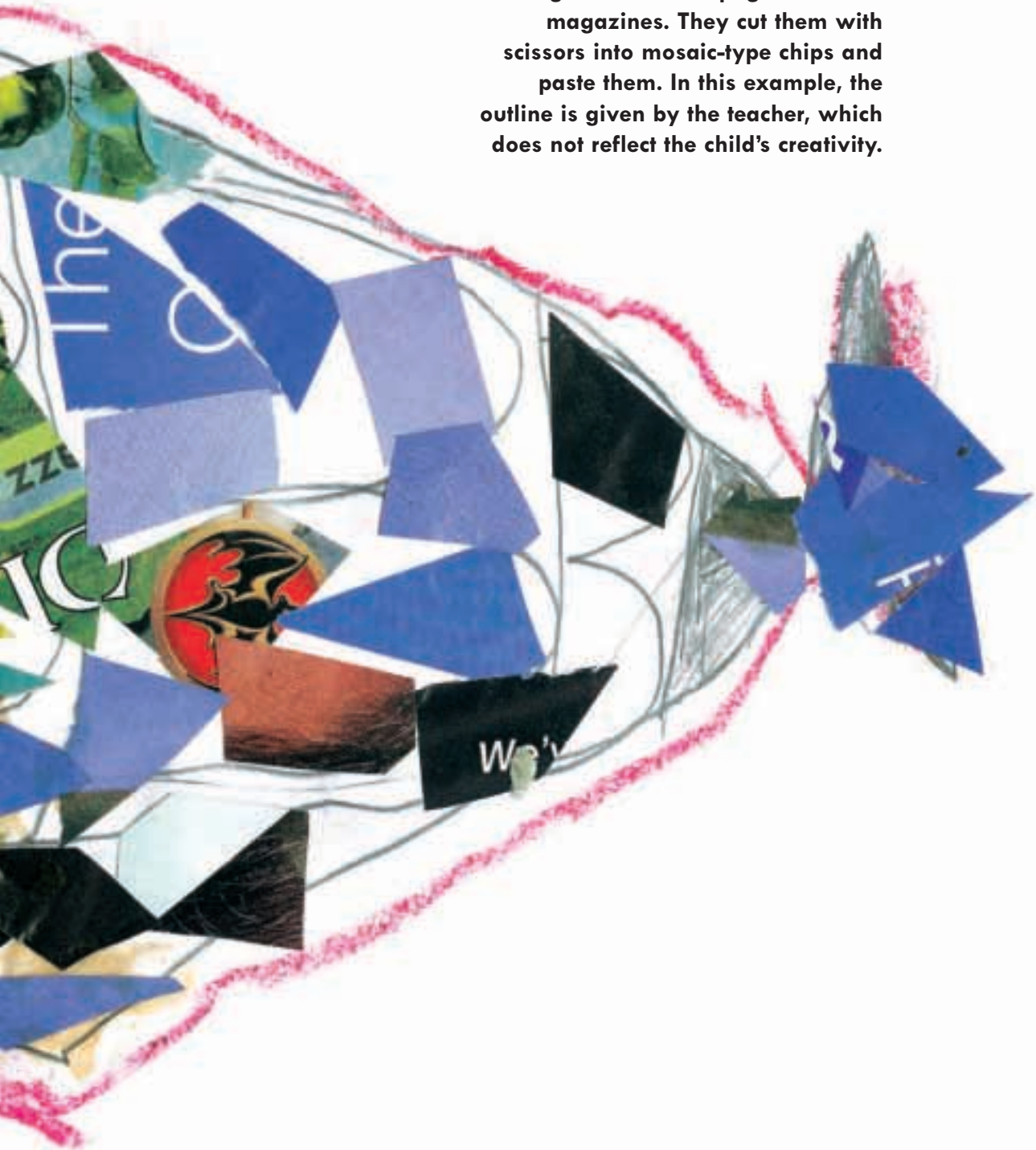


PRINTING WITH OBJECTS: Simple objects such as keys and coins are mounted on matchboxes, dipped in paint, and used like stamps. This resembles block printing; a repetitive pattern is made, which then becomes a design.





CUTTING AND PASTING: Children are given colourful pages from old magazines. They cut them with scissors into mosaic-type chips and paste them. In this example, the outline is given by the teacher, which does not reflect the child's creativity.





MUSIC AND MOVEMENT: CLR works with the Warli, a tribal community in Maharashtra. Teachers from the community brought in their traditional songs and poems appropriate for young children, and their own artists illustrated this booklet of poems in the Warli dialect.

५. भादवडी

भादवडी बांध बांधला, वान्या पान्या नू नेला
नागली रोप लावल, वान्या पाया नू नेल
भादवडी बांध बांधला, वान्या पान्या नू नेला
वरई रोप लावल, वान्या पान्या नू नेल

६. ये पाण्या
ये पाण्या मोटा झड
बेलकड्यांचा टोपा भर
टोप पडला बावीत
पानी आला धांवीच, कूकड







*Too soon
The patterns
Tell us how
To move
Too soon
Leave your dreams
Outside the door.
The sky is blue
Cut the line
Make a star
Stop!*

*Too soon
And soon
The patterns
Tell us how
To think
To feel
Too soon
The originals are gone
And in their place
The pattern of a single face*

Poem credit: By Jean Warren;
quoted in *Young Children*, Vol. 33,
No. 2, NAEYC, 1978

Embodying Dharithri: Ways of World-making

Arzu Mistry

Project Vision is a design and education research collective that develops educational alternatives focussed on the urban Indian context. On invitation from the Dwarkanath Reddy Ramapuram Trust and the Association for Voluntary Action, an organisation working in the slums for twenty-five years, Project Vision designed three learning centres, called Drishya Kalika Kendras, in different slums in Bangalore. Arzu Mistry, a research associate at Project Vision as well as an artist-in-residence at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore, gives us a ringside view of these centres, which she describes as “located between school and not-school”.

We were sitting on the floor, ten children and I. We had two concentric circles drawn with chalk, filled with a multitude of items: sticks, stones, leaves, bits of paper with drawings on them, some drawings done in chalk on the floor, and a bowl of water. The inner circle corresponded to 'who we are' and the outer circle to 'who we want to be'.

One child picked up a compound leaf and said, "This represents me in a group. I'm always with my friend; that's who I am right now. The single leaf in the 'who I want to be' circle represents my wish to be more independent." Another child picked up a thick bamboo stick: "I chose this bamboo stick because it is very firm and it signifies that my thoughts are very firm," he said. "The splinters on the end signify that sometimes my thoughts are splintered and all over the place." He then picked up a dollar sign he had made with tape and sticks and said, "I made this sign for money because I want to be rich but it's made of sticks because I want to be environmentally friendly."

These children were given ten minutes to bring their contributions to the circle. I had asked them to think symbolically and find meaning in different things around them to

represent who they are right now and who they want to be in the future. They surprised me with the depth of their thinking. A month ago, this group of children were unable to think in such an abstract and symbolic manner, and that they do so now is evidence, I believe, of the impact of arts education.

Arts education is not only about making good painters or dancers; it is primarily about making creative thinkers. To give children permission to think about their thinking and begin to define themselves is a small step towards self-awareness. A couple of the children in this circle feel they are terrible artists because they don't draw well; I tell them it's their ideas that are most important.

The arts are a way of making meaning, of knowing ourselves and of negotiating our connection with our environment. They allow us a multitude of languages in which to think, express and communicate. Contemporary artists today are expanding these languages and blurring the lines between art and not-art. Conceptualisation is taking precedence over representation. The ways of making meaning of the world are multifaceted. In this article I share our ongoing work with children, of making their internal processes of

meaning-making external through artful thinking and multiple forms of expression. Here the children are architects, animators, dancers, sculptors, toy-makers, puppeteers and much more. The examples I quote below are from the work of Project Vision at Drishya Kalika Kendra.

The Drishya Kalika Kendras are a set of three learning centres located in the slums of Bangalore city. Serving children between the ages of seven and seventeen from seven urban poor communities around the city, Drishya straddles the line between school and 'not-school'. Envisioned by members of the Association for Voluntary Action and Dwarakanath Reddy Ramanapuram Trust as creative and vibrant centres for change in urban poor communities, Drishya has engaged and empowered children since 2002. The programme at Drishya is created in partnership with Project Vision,¹ an education research collaborative at the Srishti College of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore.

Dharithri and the Edible Gardens

When working with children from urban poor communities, it is essential that we consider issues of survival. With this in mind we strive

to build a sustainable and deep connection between them and their environment. Dharithri, the term for Mother Earth, is our primary curriculum through which this relationship is developed. To develop an understanding of interdependence, the connection between man and his environment, we ask questions: Is Earth the right place for us? Is life, as we know it, at risk? Can you predict what the world will be like in 2020? Is your forecast an inconvenient truth or an impossible thing? These essential questions connect a wide range of understandings about the earth, from the children's study of the solar system and of the earth's planetary position that makes it just right for life, to the migratory patterns of the pelicans and painted storks that annually visit Hebbal Lake. By looking at the survival of life forms and the links and connections between them, children make sense of our world. But how do they understand the connection between themselves and their environment?

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorders*, links the troubling trends in attention-deficit disorders, depression, childhood obesity and diabetes to children's lack of connection with

By looking at the survival of life forms and the links and connections between them, children make sense of our world.

nature. He shares with us this quote from a five-year-old: "I like to play indoors better because that is where all the electrical outlets are." This statement frames the problem for us in a very succinct way. There is a disconnect between our day-to-day reality and our connection to the environment. The emphasis on the logical, the technological and the technical in life, learning and play, detaches us from the tactile and the imaginary. As adults at home or in schools, maybe we overemphasise Nature as the other, something distant and apart. Yes, we want our children to save the earth, we want them to help the polar bears and save the rainforests, but what about the right here and the right now? Are we causing Nature to take on an abstract form to which they are not able to mentally connect because it is too large and distant a concept? So I ask: Where is the disconnect?

At Drishya, the concept of the environment is very real. Each centre has an Edible Garden (which is also a Butterfly Garden) where children

grow food to supplement their Akshaya Pathra² lunch. These are sacred spaces for us—spaces to ponder and meditate, spaces to interact and make art, spaces to learn and observe science in action. At each centre the garden transforms a different space: one garden is on borrowed land, an empty plot across the street; the other is on the roof and on the footpath; and the third is on top of a storm-water drain. The Edible Gardens become a centre, a very real and immediate interaction with the environment. Children watch seeds germinate and grow. They eat from their garden, save seeds and assist another cycle of growth. Connected to this one simple cycle of their nutrition are many other cycles such as the life cycle of insects in the garden, the cycles of water that nurture their plants and the cycles of the plants' relationship with the sun and the soil. All this science is made visible in their front yard. In the next circle are spaces, such as the lakes in the city, which children observe as sites that make possible the

interactions between animals, the water and the city. Further beyond come spaces such as the herpetology centre and rainforest at Agumbe and the phenomenon of the migratory pelicans and painted storks at Kokkrellur.³

Embedded in these expanding circles is the Project Vision hypothesis for change in how we educate our children. Education need not be confined within the institutional walls of the traditional school. The community (gardens and centres in the slums), the city (lakes) and the state (rainforests and villages) can all become sites for learning.

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Disaggregation of learning environments to small, local and real contexts allows for learning to happen everywhere. To illustrate this, children from Drishya used the opportunity presented by the huge excavations during the construction of the international airport to study layers of soil. They were able to use a *real* tactile context to make evident the often abstract concepts of different types of rocks/layers of the earth. The study of multiple local sites helps them construct a network of interdependence as they study the scientific with the sociological. These same children engaged with local communities around the airport that

traditionally worked in sericulture. The influx of jobs and the changing economic landscape have transformed the lives of these communities. Their relationship to their land has changed. This understanding could not have been reached just through the study of science (soil) or with the study of changing economics (job influx). In order to fully understand the relationship between human beings and their environment one has to use an interdisciplinary approach. Scientific or sociological phenomena have deep connections we miss out on when we don't look at the whole picture.

New Leonardos: Linking the Arts and Ecology

So where does art fit into this complex web of observing, learning and connecting? We see our young people as New Leonardos. Leonardo Da Vinci was a scientist, mathematician, inventor, architect, painter, ecologist, musician and more. He made meaning of his world through these multiple disciplines. Here our children make meaning of their environment as both scientists and artists. They put on many disciplinary hats to make sense of their world: sometimes they don the

role of a mathematician; at other times they are social anthropologists.

Can a single teacher facilitate these diverse ways of learning? Not unless he or she is supported by other players in the field of education, be they educators, local experts, artists or community members. At Drishya we strive for a balance between continuity and turbulence. We achieve continuity through the day-to-day rituals and processes that make up the Drishya model. The turbulence interjects bursts of creative energy to energise the day-to-day; it could take the form of camps, *melas* (celebrations) or expeditions. The examples illustrated below are from several two-week intensive camps with contemporary artists interspersed throughout the year. The camp model allows the children to interact with artists and immerse themselves deeply in a new context. The knowledge developed in these camps links back to the Dharithri curriculum.

In one such project the children created papier-mâché and wire insects

based on direct observations from their garden. They studied these creepy-crawlies, drew pictures of at least three different types and analysed the way they move. They looked at various joint structures and figured out how to recreate them, using wire, valve tubing, screws and wood. Using papier-mâché in combination with joints, cams, cranks, levers and strings they created insects. Each insect brought with it its own breed of physics. Children had to consider balance, weight and centre of gravity to make sure their insects would remain intact and not fall apart while moving. In parallel they worked with Scratch⁴ and sound and light sensors to add further dimensions to their insects' lives. During the process they took apart toys to see how they work and constructed models using Lego. Ultimately these insects made their home in the garden and were celebrated under the pergola with stories of habitat, survival and interdependence. Many insects were particularly happy with the lack of

Here our children make meaning of their environment as both scientists and artists. They put on many disciplinary hats to make sense of their world.

pesticides and the organic nature of the garden.

This hands-on two-week intensive camp called “Physics by Design” was facilitated by a group of artists and educators: Ms Vanya Sahi, Mr Gautham Dayal, Ms Dipti Sonawane, Mr Palash Mukhopadhyay, Mr Uday Kumar and Ms Shubha Nagahanumantharao.

Ways of World-making: Intuition, Imagination and Intelligence

We strive to balance the three Rs of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic with the three Is of Intuition, Imagination and Intelligence. The contemporary artist has the ideal disposition of a contemporary student: one of inquiry, interdisciplinary thinking, and a driving need to make meaning of the complex world we live in through rational and irrational, technological and natural, and tame and wild ways.

In the example above, the real context comes from observing the insects in the garden, creating a connection to them and then working intuitively with the way their bodies move and function. The imagination is engaged by embodying the spirit of these insects, be it in constructing their body, programming the light and

sound sensors based on movement or creating the stories that connect them to the garden. Finally the intelligence, which is stimulated by the construction of the model through trial-and-error, stems from an understanding of the physics of the joints and the making of the moveable parts in conjunction with the static parts.

The way of making sense of the world comes with engaging the *Intuition*. You make a guess or a prediction and take a leap, stretching and exploring beyond known territory. Intuition is a heightened sense of awareness, a sense that something is right or not, even when you cannot explain why. Intuition is hardly given legitimacy in our very logical world. Then comes the process of stretching the *Imagination*. The imagination gives you a place to envision, explore and take risks. An expansive imagination is essential in order to be creative. Finally comes *Intelligence*, an embodied intelligence, one that is based in observing, making and doing, then dialoguing, thinking and questioning—an intelligence that grows from first-person experience.

The arts help us hold these three I’s as a central part of the Drishya programme. We use the arts to make meaning of the day-to-day

curriculum, whether it is through drawing in the garden or role-playing complex scenarios, but the real leaps in artistic practice happen through these camp spaces where students and facilitators interface with contemporary artists. They are not just summer or winter camps but can happen any time in the year and are often led by artists from two or three different disciplines. This interaction provides an artistic leap for everyone involved: the facilitators learn tools to use during the year; the children, often in mixed age groups, learn how to make meaning through different languages; and the teaching artists have the opportunity to learn from one another. In the examples I share below, a dancer teaches, with a video artist and an interdisciplinary artist looking at the connection between art and science. Artists from the Janapada Loka, an institution in Ramanagara district near Bangalore that aims to preserve Karnataka's folk culture, work with media artists and animators. These interdisciplinary interactions create a rich, creative and supportive space for artistic growth.

Transmedia Storytelling

As artists, we know there are multiple ways of knowing and making

meaning. Storytelling is one of these forms. Contemporary practitioners worked as creative triggers to stimulate both the facilitators and students at Drishya to tell their stories. Puppeteers, Janapada Loka artists, animators and designers used folk and digital forms to help students tell stories of their environment. They combined multiple disciplines to weave a story, a form called Transmedia Storytelling.⁵

Children began by telling stories about their daily realities. They talked about their ways of living, their identities, the social issues in their communities, and the environment around them. Using mobile phones to record sounds and stories, and digital cameras to capture images from their environment, they created image and audio banks on a Ning site (a web 2.0 social networking site) called Kathegala Kanaja. Here children could make their own stories by using each other's images and sounds.

Interfacing with the web and Ning was completely new for the kids. Ms Kinnari Thakkar, the designer of the site and the project, introduced the concepts of inboxes and email to the kids by creating paper prototypes of actual mailboxes. The physical nature of sending messages to each other helped them understand the concepts

Children began by telling stories about their daily realities. They talked about their ways of living, their identities, the social issues in their communities, and the environment around them.

of mailboxes, public and private messaging, downloading, folders, and personal pages to store videos, images, blogs, micro-blogs and audios. Whatever they collected from their communities or recorded, it all came together on this main site.

Local artisans came in to teach kids about making puppets with newspaper and other locally available material. The Janapada Loka artists helped transform their stories into beautiful songs interspersed with narration. The settings of the stories, be they garden, village or slum, were created using (the program) Scratch. The final performance was this amazing mix and remix of all the media that was collected.

The banks of media allowed children to share their material with each other. They used someone else's image to make their story and someone else's audio to enhance their puppet show. The final show evolved through the process; there was no single pre-determined form. The puppets were the characters and Scratch provided them the

environment in which to use these puppets. The setting was projected from a digital projector and the puppets were held out in front of them. The sound was provided by a mixture of the recordings and narrations created with the Janapada Loka artists and the sounds they had recorded from their communities.

The interactions between the digital and the physical were fascinating. One story about an angry crow had a crow puppet who through a tap of the computer key, digitally excreted on the puppet below it. What became apparent to us was that most of the stories had a strong social and environmental focus. The mix of media enhanced the children's metaphorical thinking as they found multiple real and virtual ways to represent their ideas.

This project was designed and executed by Ms Kinnari Thakkar, Mr Murali, Ms Shailaja S. and Ms Danielle Martin with support from Mr Wasim Sheik, Mr Ravi Kolar and Mr Ramkrishnappa.

Moon Vehicle Project

Exciting the imagination, sparking curiosity and allowing for playfulness makes one open to making connections and thereby learning and understanding. People often ask, "Are they learning science?" I would say that the gates to science learning have been opened. What is evidence of learning, anyway? Excitement, curiosity, questions, connections, confusion and explanations are all signs of learning and can be signs of learning science.

Much of the work we do at Drishya is focussed on the local as a way to make meaning of the global. We are also alert to the 'now' as a way to make meaning of the past, present and future. We constantly attempt to connect the current happenings in the world to what has happened before and what will happen after. The newspaper, world events and popular culture are all a way to make meaning of the world.

In October 2008, Chandrayaan-1 was launched from the Sriharikota space centre in southern India. Ms Joanna Griffin, an artist who had been researching satellites with the goal to understand the relationship between people and the orbital environment, came to Srishti College of Art, Design

and Technology as Artist-in-Residence to mentor the 'Moon Vehicle' project. The launching of Chandrayaan gave us the opportunity to connect the dots and think about what the common person's consciousness of space is. The project is an ongoing investigation through art practice of the science and culture of the moon. Through the Drishya summer camp we also asked how space education was relevant to kids.

Our consciousness of space exists either in mythological stories or in hard science. The students began by creating stories from these two ends: starting first with Man who created folk stories and myths because he did not know about the science of the moon, and ending with what we know scientifically, and making stories from there. The space between these two points is filled with questions, stories, misconceptions, science fiction, people's science and the actual data we get from the satellites. Without privileging one over the other, Ms Joanna Griffin, Ms Babita Harry, Ms Anitha Santhanam and Ms Vidhya Prakash brought together visual art, physical theatre, dance, story and science in this two-week intensive camp on exploring and understanding the Chandrayaan spacecraft with the Drishya students.

Much of the work we do at Drishya is focussed on the local as a way to make meaning of the global.

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The camp began with children mapping proximities and thinking about how far their environment stretched. They thought about their home and their communities, and expanded outwards, thinking of themselves as the centre. Similarly they mapped the solar system and thought about how the moon was connected to them. The facilitators and artists focussed on transforming the hard science of textbooks to the real and soft science of embodied learning and communication. The children visited the nearby Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Satellite Centre where Chandrayaan had been built. They also visited the Indian Deep Space Network from where huge dishes follow the path of the moon, tracking Chandrayaan. They spoke to scientists there and interviewed them about their relationship to the moon. Because they were unable to take any recorders or cameras into the ISRO, the kids drew portraits and kept detailed documentations of their visit. Upon returning they donned their masks and caps and embodied the clean

room at ISRO while they built their own satellites and created performances characterising the moon, Chandrayaan and the communication dishes.

Making meaning of something as abstract as the moon, something you cannot see up close but has a large impact on your life, is an incredibly complex and exciting process. The moon was projected on the floor of the centre, creating a beautiful space to expand the imagination and share stories about the moon. Many of their stories and the learning from the ISRO field trips were embodied through dance and art.

Mixing, myth, story and science the children celebrated this process they had been through and shared their understandings with the larger community. The scientists from the ISRO and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics brought in gigantic telescopes for the children to view the moon. The sheer excitement, awe and intermingling of science, art and story made this an incredibly rich experience for all involved.

Classroom of the Future

The work we do is about a deep connection to life, to survival and to empowering these children in viewing their environment as a place for opportunity and positive social change. Architecture For Humanity, an international voluntary non-profit organisation that promotes architectural solutions for global issues, invited architects and designers worldwide to design a 'Classroom of the Future'. The need, in the next twenty years, to educate more and more children through sustainable means, was the driving force behind this competition.

Given that Drishya has the same visions for sustainable education, we felt that it was a great opportunity to engage our children in a global conversation about education for all. Mr Jackson Porretta, an ecological designer, along with Ms Arzu Mistry, Ms Deeptha Satish, and other designers from the Srishti College of Art Design and Technology, worked in partnership with the children and Mr Lakshakumar and Ms Shubha Nagahanumantharao from Drishya to submit a proposal for this competition. We knew that participating in an international competition with over 600 architects

from all over the world would be tough and possibly frustrating for the youth. We realised that as educators we needed to project the contest as a rich learning experience for them.

Habits of the Mind

One of the ways we did this at Drishya was by developing the *Habits of the Mind*.⁶ Habits of the Mind are mental dispositions that we all engage with when we are faced with a dilemma or situation, the answer to which is not easily apparent. Some examples of these are the ability to reflect, the ability to persevere when things get hard and the ability to observe closely in order to find out information. These are all things we do, but making the awareness of these habits intentional helps us work through tough uncharted territory and helps the children we work with transfer the frustration of a particularly tough engagement and recast it as a stretching and exploration of the self or the need to engage and persist through the problem. Many of our conversations about these mental dispositions happen around the daily Mandala and meditation where we spend considerable time working on the inner self. The Mandala becomes a

space to discuss everything—all the ‘stuff’ that does not fit into the typical life of school.

Many children and adults are constrained in thinking that being an artist is all about developing a craft or a technique to be a good painter, sculptor or dancer. This is just a one-dimensional view. To be an artist one has to develop the artistic mind. How does one think as an artist? I reiterate that our role with arts education in schools is not to turn out a whole class of artists but instead to develop a whole generation of people with artistic minds. The ability to think deeply, sensitively, creatively and with flexibility illustrates that being an artist is as much a cognitive process as it is a physical or embodied one. As an artist you envision, imagine, express, observe, reflect and critique. You stretch and explore, take risks and make mistakes and you connect with other people in the art world. These are dispositions of the artist’s mind.

Through the six to eight weeks of intense work on the project the students focussed on getting their drawing skills up to par to produce detailed architectural plans, elevations and sections, and make architectural models. They learned about natural building techniques and ways to use waste as a resource for building

cheaply and sustainably. They designed for a particular site in their neighbourhood building, and arrived at an understanding of how to work with the factors of sun, wind and seasons for that site.

Each group of student designers had to keep the following questions in mind:

What is the pattern of learning at Drishya and how does our design complement it?

How does your classroom interact with the sun, wind, rain, and acoustics?

How do the physical aspects of the classroom inspire learning (windows, doors, boards, benches, etc)?

How does your classroom deal with waste?

How does your classroom improve the environment and have a positive ecological footprint?

How does your classroom inspire creative play?

The children truly functioned as artists and architects for those six to eight weeks. They visited a site-specific installation by an artist who used waste plastic bags to create the most exquisite tent. When walking towards the installation they thought it had been made of coloured glass because the quality of light was

Many children and adults are constrained in thinking that being an artist is all about developing a craft or a technique to be a good painter, sculptor or dancer. This is just a one-dimensional view.

dazzling. It was incredible to watch their disbelief as they approached the tent and realised it was made of waste packets they see all over the place. Another discussion ensued. Was this a legitimate shelter? It did not protect the people inside from wind and rain; it only functioned as a shade protection. Others argued that just the colour and beautiful quality of light was enough.

We could see many influences of this visit in the kids' designs of their meditation space. The children were engaging in large global issues through designing for their local contexts and issues. This is another balance we strive to hold. How do we balance the global with the local? Heated conversations during critiques centred on arguing whether we needed to design for forty children, like in our centres, or 500 children like in the government school next door. The children were engaged in conversations around quality, scale and need for education. As artists they

were a part of global conversations about important and relevant topics and issues keeping their real context (socio-economic, cultural, geographic and environmental) in mind.

The relevance of this project for us was far beyond teaching them about architecture or the environment. Most of the children we work with are children of construction workers. We were making the leap from a field they understood and positioning them at the level of a designer with a global consciousness. They presented their work and received feedback from architects and designers in the city, validating the importance of the work they were doing and pushing them to think beyond their concept of school and classroom. One student has continued to pursue this work and has submitted drawings and models in order to build a one-room schoolhouse in her community. Others have designed elaborate rainwater catchment systems based on research of various rainwater-

The process of making sense of the world in many ways goes beyond the boundaries of arts education. Layers of connections are woven together as we make meaning of the world as artists, scientists and social anthropologists.

harvesting models.

The examples I have shared speak to the larger purpose of our work at Drishya—to build environmental and artistic behaviours in our children in the hope that they continue to be environmental stewards and creative thinkers. The methods through which we do this are the camps, which facilitate deep interactions with artists and ecologists through intensive project-based sessions. The forms are varied, and the knowledge gained, plentiful. The process of making sense of the world in many ways goes beyond the boundaries of arts education. Layers of connections are woven together as we make meaning of the world as artists, scientists and social anthropologists. This layering helps develop a multifaceted, multi-layered, multi-levelled, complex and connected

understanding of the world. Yet we have not done this in abstract ways; we have always started with the local and relevant and moved out to the universal.

I started this article by sharing a couple of moments from a conversation with children about who we are and who we want to be, and I end with another excerpt from that conversation. One child says, “Who I am? I’m young. I put a leaf for that, a fresh green leaf.” Pointing at the odd-shaped leaf, he adds, “Who I want to be is unique.”

My hope is that each child, through her wide exposure to many artists who have come together to make Drishya happen, is able to connect to her passions and truly be unique in her future interactions with the world.

ENDNOTES:

1. In addition to the programme at Drishya, Project Vision conducts 'Entering the Center', a middle school programme at Mallya Aditi International School.
2. In partnership with central and state governments, Akshaya Pathra is the largest school meal programme in India. It provides food to low-income schools. It believes that an education should not be lost because a child is going hungry. The Drishya centres supplement the Akshaya Pathra lunch with a vegetable and/or ragi. Most often the vegetable is from the Edible Gardens.
3. Kokkrellur, the village of storks, is a village not far from Bangalore. During October and November it experiences the annual migration of flocks of painted storks and pelicans. The students from Drishya have visited Kokkrellur many times to understand the interdependent relationship between man, bird and environment.
4. Scratch is a program developed by the Life Long Kindergarten Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Center. It allows one to import drawings, images, videos and audio, and animate all the stories. This lab in partnership with Project Vision has made the program available to

urban poor students by converting it into local languages such as Kannada, Telugu and Hindi.

5. Henry Jenkins, co-founder of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program, talks about transmedia storytelling as the coming together of integral elements of a story through multiple delivery channels, in his *Transmedia Storytelling Book: Convergence Culture* (2006) I have used his article 'Transmedia Storytelling' on his blog, available at www.henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html

6. 'Habits of the Mind' are a way many educators are talking today about developing and articulating the means of, and having a disposition toward, behaving intelligently when confronted with problems, the answers to which are not immediately known: dichotomies, dilemmas, enigmas and uncertainties. Many authors and educators have written about the Habits of the Mind. The Studio Habits of the Mind focus particularly on artistic practice and are illustrated in the book *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* by Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, Shirley Veneema, Kimberly M. Sheridan: Teachers College Press, September 2007.

Participatory Theatre: Live, Risky, Rewarding

Maya Krishna Rao

All photographs, by S. Thyagarajan, show scenes from *Pandita Ramabai*, conceived, scripted and directed by Maya Krishna Rao and realised by Sanskaar Rang Toli, the theatre-in-education company of the National School of Drama (NSD). A programme for Class Nine and above, it is currently touring Delhi schools.

Some of the most far-reaching lessons learnt in the classroom can emerge from a skilful use of participatory theatre, says Maya K. Rao. In its highest form, it can prove to be an invaluable and rewarding teaching method, where teachers and students start off on an equal footing and create knowledge together. The classroom becomes a microcosm of the world. Maya describes one such project in Leeds, England, which she was involved in, and which turned out to be a lesson in History, Civics, Biology and Sociology—all rolled into one.



Participatory theatre conjures up many things to many people but usually it moves along a notion of 'interactive theatre'—where the actors may either leave their fictionalised context and 'go out' to meet and engage with the audience in their space, sometimes not as characters but as actors/people, or, conversely, draw the audience 'in' to the time, space and context of the play so that the actors stay in character and assume that the audience too belongs to their world. In both cases, it is usually the actors who hold the reins and control the progress and outcome of the play.

This form of interaction, however, stands at one end of the spectrum of 'participatory theatre'—the low end. At the other end of the spectrum lies another understanding of the term that draws out the best of what theatre is truly capable of: where theatre is live, relevant, risky, unplanned, and where none of the players (neither actors nor audience) really know the outcome. The playing *is* the knowing—it is a theatre where the actors hand over the reins to the audience (participants) and let them take charge of the material of the drama and, therefore, its outcome. The audience then may also take on roles and enter this fictional world.

However, they live their roles spontaneously; there is no script to follow. So, the theatre is fictional but the action and experience of the role is real. As happens in life, they too experience life and 'learn' from it as they go along—never knowing the next moment, unscripted. And often these are the most deep-reaching lessons.

In what follows, I will share the doing of a participatory theatre project that I was a part of. The experience changed my perception of theatre and strengthened my conviction that theatre is not something only to be performed but a great way to learn, and teachers in classrooms (not just actors) should be using it as a method of teaching par excellence.

'Heiretokos or The One Who Chooses' was a theatre programme created by a company that I was a part of in Leeds, England. This was in the 1980s. Their brief was to make plays and tour with them in schools in the Leeds area. I was invited to join them, fortunately, at a moment when the company was going through a big change. They were saying, "We are not going to make straight plays any more ... no more scriptwriting, rehearsals, no more the division between 'actors' (the company) and 'audience' (students), no playing in an

auditorium with a separate stage and seating area... let's turn the whole thing upside down." This led to a long search based on the question: What is drama? Not theatre, but *drama*. If we want theatre to be relevant and of real learning value to students, then we cannot have them sitting passively as audience for the length of the play, as learning is not a passive act; they will need to become active participants, steering the action to some degree. In such a scenario, the actors cannot pre-decide entirely what the students will learn from the experience. In fact, we came to the understanding that the

better way of 'teaching' was to present, in a theatrical way, a context, a set of characters related to a theme, and to then allow the students to participate in the action (that is, they too take on roles) and, in this way, to allow them to learn their own lessons. That's drama. The crux of the matter lies in choosing a theme that is both relevant to them and yet has something that the company thinks is important for them to learn from. In other words, there is a visible theme with subliminal issues that the participants are asked to engage and grapple with.



The company decided to make a programme for sixteen-year-olds. So our task was, first, to observe the age group, and next, to begin asking a set of questions. What are the concerns uppermost in their minds? What is kicking in them now—what are the issues they battle with, in themselves, with their peers and with the world? What kind of event/story would work as a peg to investigate these concerns? Eventually, we decided to focus on a cluster of themes along the broad spectrum of sexuality and identity. For an adolescent this manifests in questions such as: Why is my body changing so fast? Am I moving from being child to adult? Who am I? How can I be what I want to be instead of what others want me to be?

We were a company of three women and, for the next few weeks, each of us went our own way rummaging through libraries and textbooks, talking to experts and writers—looking for a good story as a peg to drive our theme. We came upon a heart-stopping fragment of history that should have been a part of their history/science textbooks but had got buried under a mound of historical information and facts. We decided it was perfect not simply for our chosen age group but for ourselves as well!

We then went on to make a

participatory theatre programme where there was only five minutes of pre-rehearsed theatre and the rest of the one-and-a-half hours was left for the students to decide and conduct. We handed over the story, as it were, to the students for them to take over and make sense of it for themselves.

This was the fragment of history, of true life, that we chanced upon: a certain James Barry, born in 1797 in England, joined the British army, trained as a regimental surgeon, died at the ripe (for that time) age of seventy-one, and upon his death it was discovered that he was a woman. That is all we could find about her, no more.

This was ideal material in every which way for adolescents; it was brimming over with questions of sexuality intertwined with identity. Here was a girl who decided to become Dr James Barry (JB from here on), not through biological transformation but through how she lived and presented herself. Did she do it to be able to enter the medical profession since women were not allowed to do so in her time? This meant that she must have gone through the change before she turned seventeen, for that was the age at which boys entered medical college in her time. (Interestingly, and of

relevance, it was the age of the participants as well.) What did it mean to her to be a man? How did she feel when she looked into the mirror... how different was it when she met her mates after work? Did she try and change her thoughts to feel more like a man and thus keep her secret safe? How did she manage when she fell in love? These were some of the questions that drew the students into the drama. What was wonderful was that we had no answers to the questions either, since we knew no more than the bare outline of the story that we shared with them. So the actors and students were on an equal footing. There was no teacher and the taught in this scenario. Both would be creators of knowledge together.

The interest for the students was in recreating her story and experiencing 'what it must have been like'. The aim of the company was to challenge the students at every step of the way, via the character of JB and others (created by the students) who might have been part of her life. At a general level, it would also give students an opportunity to explore the kinds of important *decisions* we make—what decisions we make, why, and with what repercussions.

We racked our brains (and bodies,

in rehearsal) for a good two months on how to craft those five minutes of pre-rehearsed theatre that would be a start of a journey for the students. It needed to rouse the curiosity of the students, yet it needed to contain the larger themes that we wanted them to address/experience while building JB's story. It required the students not merely to sympathise with JB but to raise questions about her unusual decision.

The opening scene the students saw was a bed with an ornate, expensive bedspread under which could be made out the outline of a lifeless body. A midwife who had probably been preparing the body for burial is just finishing covering its head with the bedspread. She stands staring down at the bed, pensively. Then she silently walks around the room, tentatively touching 'his' surgeon's uniform hanging on the coat-stand, looking through the microscope on the table. (We wanted the teenagers to ask themselves the question: Does the midwife, as a woman of medicine, recognise the anatomy drawing that lies under the microscope?) She takes a final look around the room, packs her kit, and leaves.

Once the midwife leaves, the facilitator asks the students: "What

kinds of thoughts were going through her mind? What do you think...? When she was handling the uniform...? Can you suggest any?" And the students, because the whole story is such a captivating one, immediately start suggesting thoughts such as: "Why did you have to do this?" "Why couldn't you have stayed a woman?" "Did you do it for money?" "Was it worth losing your identity for?" "You and I do the same thing, so why did you have to be a man?" "Were you happier than I am?" ... In fact, a range of questions around identity, decision-making, social norms etc. get

transmuted through the midwife's character. The facilitator then calls the actor who played the midwife and says, "Annalyn, please play it again, go through all the motions again, but this time use the thoughts that have been suggested to you (by the students)." The midwife re-plays. And this time she speaks out her thoughts. In this way the students take a further step towards taking ownership of the drama, for the thoughts now being enacted were suggested by them. Of course the actor also, cleverly, adds little details and dimensions that are designed to raise further questions in



the students' minds—what the quality of life was in nineteenth century England, for instance, or about British imperialism (as a regimental surgeon, JB must have been posted to lands that were under the British Empire), or what the nature of gender relations was and how they were manifest in society at the time.

The midwife stands in complete opposition to JB. She too is a person of medicine and surgery, though she is not trained in a formal institution like JB. However, she is a woman, unlike JB who has chosen to be a man. She

has not been to a medical school but learns her profession from elders, plucks her own herbs, makes her potions, delivers babies ... and prepares bodies for burial. She too is an accepted 'doctor', though only for the poorer classes.

We created the character of the midwife to introduce a counterpoint to JB. Historically and sociologically, it was fitting. It was more than likely that such a midwife would have prepared JB's body for burial. She also became the vehicle for many larger questions to do with society and



education that we wanted to pose to the students. Was the gender change driven by accepted norms of class division? What is the distinction between formal education (of JB) and non-formal education (of the midwife)? Did the former have social status and was therefore reserved for men, and the latter for the lower classes and so reserved for women? And yet, did the midwife enjoy more freedom than James Barry who had to disguise her very identity in order to pursue her career? Class, occupation, gender—three prominent strands in any social framework, cutting across each other in a most unusual way, make up the unusual story of James Barry, and all three affect personal choices. What better lesson could there be in History, Civics, Biology and Sociology—all rolled into one! And that was the company's task: to get the students to experience all these larger strands in the particular context of the JB story.

The next stage of the programme was to break up the class into three groups with an actor attached to each group. With chart papers laid out in the centre, the task given to them was: 'Let's try and make up her story, her life. Who was her family? Did she have any friends? Since we don't actually know any

more, we can make it up. When was that moment that she became a man? What must have happened? Who else knew of her decision (possibility of probing issues of 'friendship,' 'loyalty,' etc)?' The students have a discussion and make up characters and a rough sketch of JB's life. They are asked to spend some time looking it over and then think of whom among these characters they would like to meet in order to know more about JB. They spend some time discussing and arguing. What is being tested here is their understanding of social relationships. Is it better to talk to a sibling, a parent or a friend? Who will actually reveal more, who will be loyal and therefore non-communicative? Also, the dialogue itself would be a lesson in strategies of social engagement.

Once the three groups decided on one character each, the company's actors would get further details from the students: How old is this person? What are they like, where do you want to meet them? Would you like to be yourselves, or reporters, or friends? In that way the students too took on roles. And then we actors, on the spot, had to be ready to take on the characters created by them, men or women, and meet the students to answer their questions. The taking on

of the character was done simply—throwing on a shawl, a coat, a shirt, etc. (We were three women actors, no men—two black, one white, which added to the complexity of the drama—and with black actors playing largely white roles!)

In playing our characters we were mindful to raise their curiosity even further; introduce further social dimensions and questions to do with the broad themes mentioned earlier, of nineteenth century life, that the students would need to grapple with to get closer to understanding JB's story; try and address, through the vehicle of JB's story, the concerns of the students themselves.

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This last we had to do by swiftly reading the underlying intention of their specific question to do with JB. For example, in an all-boys school, one group decided that JB, in order to keep her secret secure, had decided to visit a prostitute regularly and then, over time, actually fell in love with her! Quite clearly, the social norms around sex and sexuality of their own time were uppermost in their minds. JB's story was simply a handy vehicle to articulate them. And it was probably the only way that they would ever articulate, in a classroom situation, such deep-seated questions... and anxieties.

The programme would end on a

note of: 'So, even though we started with very little, we have created three possible stories of JB's life and now know what her times were like.' The company's interest was really in infusing in the students the latter part of the statement: '...what her times were like.' In other words, it was an attempt to get them to experience nineteenth century England via the captivating story of Dr James Barry.

The experience of doing this programme was so effective in bringing home to me the sheer power of drama that on my return to India, I got associated with the Theatre-in-Education Company of the National School of Drama (NSD). I made several participatory theatre programmes: 'Igloo Igloo'—on the Innuits (Eskimos) and their lifestyle, where a class of seven-year-olds actually become inhabitants of igloos; 'Dilli Sultanat'—a close look at Razia Sultan and her times; 'Bhagat Singh', where, at the end of the programme, the class of ten-year-olds faced the stern British judge as Bhagat Singh's advocate and placed before him arguments against British imperialism and his death sentence. 'Pandita Ramabai' is the latest, made in 2009, based on the amazing life of a social reformer of British India. The students get involved in her life and

projects, and, by the end, much like in the Bhagat Singh programme, argue against the threatened closure of Mukti Sadan, a unique professional training centre and home in Pune that the Pandita had established for about 2000 widows.

The real test of the role of drama in teaching and learning came, however, when the National Council for Educational Research and Training requested NSD to create a drama manual for schools for Classes One to Twelve—a manual that would firmly place drama in the curriculum

so that it may even be opted for as a subject in the Board exam at the 'Plus Two' stage (Classes Eleven and Twelve). Here was an unprecedented opportunity to put drama in the hands of a class teacher so that s/he may use it as a means of learning in the classroom.

Barry John and Abdul Latif Khatana, theatre experts with long years of experience in theatre-in-education, and I worked together for several months and produced the manual in 2006. I found that the understanding and practice gained in



the James Barry exercise went a long way in giving me a perspective, an approach and a methodology in contributing to the creation of the manual. Altogether, the making of the manual made for meaty discussions and detailed working out of a step-by-step, progressive curriculum in drama.

I took on the planning of drama for Classes One to Five. Below I list some of the learning I had gained from being in the Leeds TIE Company and of doing the James Barry programme, that I carried over into syllabus-making for the four to eleven age group in India.

Training in theatre as an art form in higher classes can be best realised when the child, at an early stage, is led into imaginary worlds to be 'lived' through, with no intention of gaining acting or other theatre skills.

Emotions lie at the centre of drama for learning. Children will learn in a deep-reaching way if their emotions are truly engaged in the drama—which means that the content of all drama activity must have an emotional 'pull' or relevance to the particular age group of students. They will participate and invest in the drama if there is something in it for



them. The teacher, therefore, has to be particularly careful in choosing themes and pitching the level of drama.

The classroom should become a microcosm of the world so that, in a sense, the continuous experience of drama is like a 'rehearsal for life'. In other words, the teacher leads students into the kind of drama that will help the student become a fuller person. Drama is about learning to locate oneself in the world, with others. It is as much about appreciating others as oneself.

The teacher is a guide; s/he creates the environment in which learning can take place; the actual learning is done by the child. The teacher cannot, in that sense, 'teach'. S/he carefully plans drama sessions that will be of learning value for the student. In well-planned drama, each student will take away from the experience his or her own individual learning.

While the student may be engaged in building a story (the particular), the teacher must identify larger themes of learning (the universal) and work them into the drama plan. (In the James Barry exercise the students were not made aware that they were actually being asked to experience the life of nineteenth century England.) The best

way to deal with 'values' through drama is not to spell them out at all, but to plan drama where they are worked into a live situation and the students have to deal with them in role. For example if an entire class, in various roles as inhabitants of a given neighbourhood, has to decide whether they will/won't attend a communal riot victim's funeral, it becomes a live lesson in 'national integration', with all its attendant social pressures and personal dilemmas. And all this without the teacher once mentioning the words 'communal', 'national integration' or 'secularism'.

In the early years, drama should not be about 'pretending' to be someone else and acting for an audience; it should be about living life for real in a fictional world set up by the teacher. Children should do drama for themselves, much like they play 'House-House'. It is real for them, and they express a range of desires, conflicts, emotions, etc. only because the drama is for themselves, not for an audience. In fact, if there were to be an audience watching, it would not be real for them any more. And it is this 'realness' that is precious for learning. So, the teacher should avoid putting young children on stage and using theatre terms such as 'scene', 'character' or 'drama', or statements such as 'Shall

we all act like birds today?’

The broad themes that ran through the syllabus for Classes One to Twelve were: Body, Voice, Mind, Space, and Drama. For the purposes of a manual, these themes needed to be viewed on a progressive scale, along with their interconnections. For example, ‘Voice’ is connected with self, identity, expression of identity, puberty, the changing voice, and, of course, it finally leads up to voice training for theatre. Each element under the broad theme of ‘Voice’ has to be given focus according to the age group of the students. Each step becomes the basis for the next.

100 ‘Voice Training’ in isolation, without it being based on exploration of self and identity, can lead to a fractured experience of drama and theatre.

Another example: An important part of the work under the rubric of ‘Body’ is an awareness and enhancement of the senses beginning from Class One, which will be the foundation for building overall sensitivity in the child later—sensitivity towards others. It is this sensitivity that will form the basis of later training in theatre as an art form.

For drama to be effective, students, as actors, should be encouraged to experience and understand the circumstances of the role, experience what it is to make tough choices, face conflicts, realise the repercussions of their decisions, experience and appreciate dealing with people whom they may consider very different from themselves, and learn how to look for solutions to difficult problems (in fact, the solution itself may not be as important sometimes as the searching for it).

In the James Barry case, it was always a tough choice for the students whether or not to ask a character why JB had decided to



Students argue against the closure of Mukti Sadan. Through Ramabai’s life, they participate in history, struggle to look for answers to the issues of the times and, in the process, gain learning that is experienced rather than simply ‘understood’.

live her life as a man. In all the twenty-five or more shows that we did, not once did a student divulge to a character related to JB that s/he knew her secret, although s/he could have. Not even to the prostitute who is considered to have low social status. They respected the prostitute's anxiety to keep the secret! They respected her as a person. And they did not snigger even once, as one would expect students (or even adults) to do, in such a situation. Such is the power of drama: it can enhance a student's (or

anyone's) sensitivity and sensibility in ways that are unimaginable.

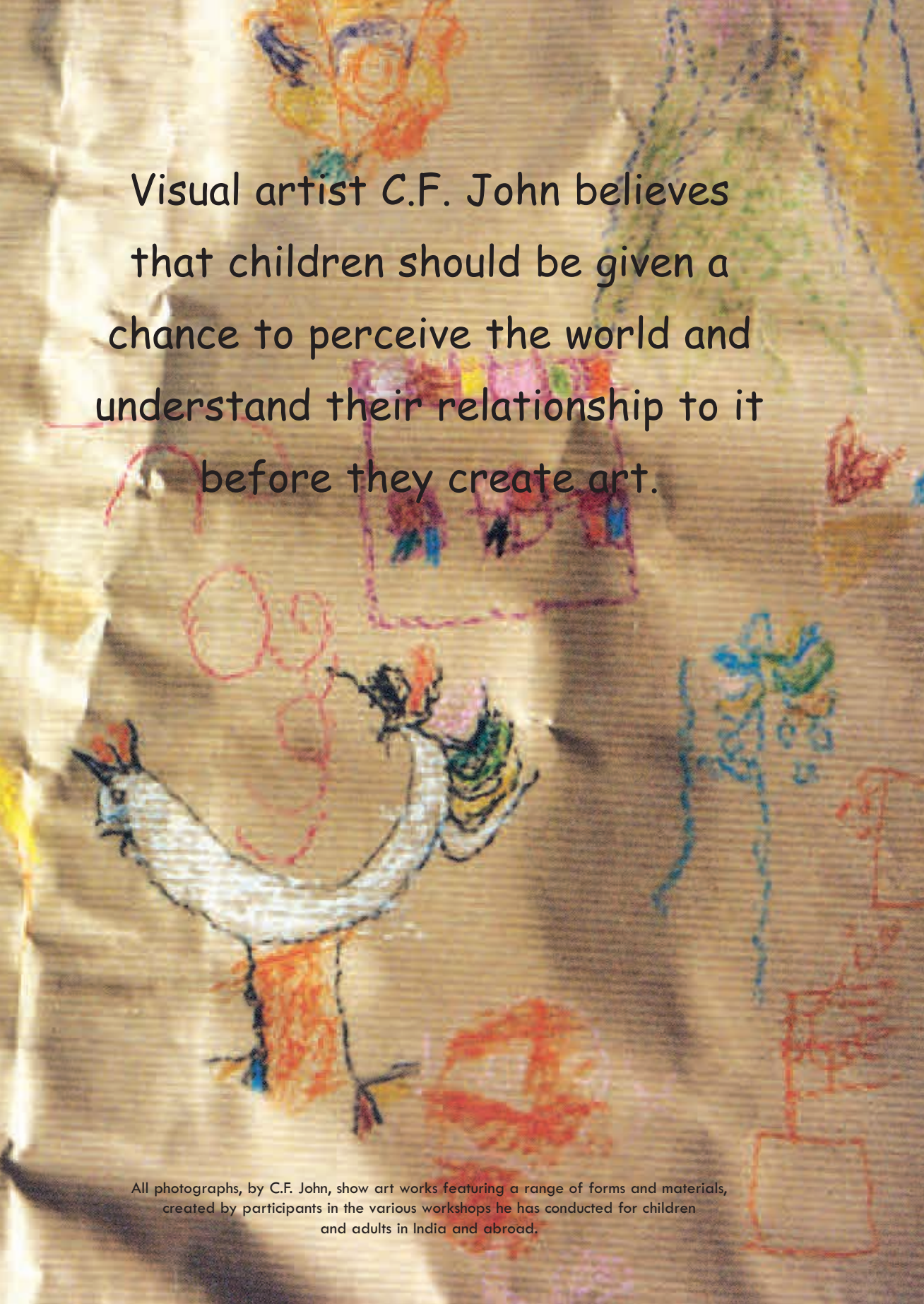
Drama and its devices hold many secrets and possibilities. It has powerful potential; it is most definitely transformative for the participant, if experienced regularly, particularly as part of the school system. And going beyond the classroom, it can make people, change people, heal wounds and help solve conflicts in a way that no other medium can.





Art in the Child's World

C.F. John



Visual artist C.F. John believes that children should be given a chance to perceive the world and understand their relationship to it before they create art.

All photographs, by C.F. John, show art works featuring a range of forms and materials, created by participants in the various workshops he has conducted for children and adults in India and abroad.

When art is introduced to children in schools, most often they are taught merely how to draw and paint, with the assumption that there is only one way to do so. But art is not only about drawing and painting, and even when it takes these forms it has to evolve from a very personal understanding of how we perceive the world and its forms.

Art is about doing things. When you introduce children to art, send them outdoors, first of all. Send them to the fields, woods, market or street, river or beach. Let them enter the

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space, feel it, understand the forms and the activities taking place within it. Let them identify what they find ugly and beautiful in the space, what comforts them and troubles them, and let them examine why they feel the way they do. Ask them what they saw not just with their naked eye but also with their inner eye. And then ask them to present what they saw in creative ways.

The scope of artistic expression is infinite and children will find innumerable



ways to express themselves. Their presentation could consist of installations or arrangements of forms. They could draw on the ground or make things from the soil. They could read from a treetop or from the bottom of a well, create a performance using elements like water or fire, or do a photo presentation. Children would come up with forms that you have not taught them but which come from the inner guidance that the space has provided them. I guarantee that you would see the space come alive, and the art come alive, and the children come alive through the art. Once they have expressed what they saw, felt, smelt, heard and touched in that space, the space would not be the same to them any more. Indeed, the world would not be the same to them any more. Everything would come alive for them. They would start seeing beauty and meaning everywhere they go.

Art should become a way of







entering the world and creatively engaging with it.

An initiation into art is also about freeing the mind from the rigidity and stereotypes of our thinking. In the name of art we often perpetuate our own stereotypes; for example, if we want children to create art on the environment we would automatically encourage them to make

posters on tree-planting, the dangers of plastic and waste, the need for clean air, and so on. The problem with an exercise like this is not just that we have reduced the subject to these specified areas of concerns. There is also the danger of viewing the environment from a utilitarian perspective. Trees are useful to us because they give us oxygen, waste is



harmful to our health, and so on. What we consider useful is controlled by our perception of significance and our perception of significance is derived from the scope of our thinking. To reduce the scope of the world to the scope of our thinking is a crime that our education system perpetrates.

What good art does is to make a leap into the so-called insignificant spaces and forms that lie in between the apparently significant things in life. This helps us find out how lives are connected. Just as a good farmer sees nothing insignificant in his farm, and sees the connection between all forms of life both animate and inanimate, the child should understand the connection between herself and everything that makes up her environment. She should be able to enter her environment the way water

flows, the way it travels in all possible ways: penetrating, soaking, filling, overflowing, refilling and travelling endlessly. She should be able to experience every possible emotion when she enters the environment, be it love, joy, agony, disturbance, anger, helplessness or hope. It is through these processes that the child can create art. This would leave room for the recognition of mystery and for the re-enchantment of the world.



About IFA



India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) is one of the country's leading independent arts funders, championing the cause of arts philanthropy and advocating the importance of the arts in public life. In the last decade and a half we have substantially enriched India's cultural landscape and infused passion and professionalism into the business of arts philanthropy.

IFA was set up in 1993 to focus on urgent but unattended needs in specific areas of the arts. Since we began we have committed more than 13 crore rupees (approximately three million US dollars) to projects located in almost every corner of the country.

Our support has gone out to independent research and teaching institutions, cultural and development organisations, scholars and artists. Musicians and choreographers, writers and visual artists, filmmakers and film scholars, architects and conservationists, sociologists and art historians, craftspersons and folk performers have been among the beneficiaries of our support.

Today we fund cutting edge artistic practice, support initiatives to bring the arts into the classroom, assist in institution development and infrastructure creation, fund research in the arts, help in the preservation and transmission of valuable cultural knowledge, and create public platforms for the dissemination and advocacy of the arts. We also act as a source of information and expertise to those in the arts community and beyond.

To receive regular information about our activities, send an email to contactus@indiaifa.org asking to join our mailing list.

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