Position Paper on

Aims of Education

The “Aims of Education” position paper by NCERT emphasizes that “education should be a liberating process” and that the curriculum should promote three key areas of development in the student: one, it should aid in the self-development of the individual through an exposure to the right set of values, two, it should impart sound knowledge in “constructivist” ways, and three, it should foster a sense of curiosity and excitement about learning. While these broad goals form the backbone of the curriculum, the position paper also lays down specifics on how to build a programme to address the above needs. Some of the key points are:

1. Closing the gap between the experience of the school and the everyday, lived reality of the student.
2. Imparting value-based education that emphasizes tolerance and caring for others
3. Awareness of cultural diversity and intercultural connectedness

To support these and other related areas, the NCERT recommends pedagogic approach where the teacher leads by example (thus calling for a teacher training programme that would connect the teacher to the above mandate), where teaching is based on “conversational,” rather than “authoritarian” modes, and connected with the “natural” environment of teachers and learners.

If cultural diversity, value education, and localisation of knowledges represent the main work of an educational system, and if the implementation is envisaged along a participatory and process-oriented approach, it is important to recognize the centrality of arts education in actualizing these aims of education. Within the space of the classroom the arts can address gaps in curriculum, pedagogy, and the imagination that emerge from the putative “banking concept” of education with its hierarchical and unilateral dispensing of information. For example, the official report on “Nali-Kali,” the state-sponsored art education program, has remarked upon the transformative effect of introducing arts into the classroom, where “[t]he relationship between the Deputy Project Coordinator, District Project Office, the teachers and the Resource Persons appeared devoid of a fear of hierarchy—a feeling that the boss had come for inspection did not seem to exist.” In the Kali-Kalisu (IFA administered arts education teacher training project) community as well, teacher testimonials have consistently emphasized the mediating role the arts have played in addressing complex issues in students’ lives: in one example, a simple art exercise of mapping village streets allowed a child to address his everyday reality of living in an impoverished neighbourhood. But over and beyond the democratizing effect, the arts have advanced ethical values by tapping into the aesthetic and imaginative capacities of subjects. The opening up of fixed and fast-frozen sensibilities—of the teacher, students and the community at large—to the arts for personal enrichment
has a direct correspondence with the dismantling of fixed and internalised ideological (dis)positions that foreclose the experience of cultural and social diversity within and outside the classroom.

The “Aims of Education” paper uses the idea of cultural diversity as a conduit to an awareness of a pluralistic world, when it says, “[t]o respect and do justice to others is also to respect and do justice to their respective cultures or communities.” At the same time, it issues a call for an education that nourishes the child’s capacities. Here too, the arts have a central significance in bridging the gap between the self-actualization and social responsibility. Curriculums make little if any reference to the world the child inhabits. In the classroom the child lives in a bubble with his/her eyes shut to whatever might be part of his/her immediate experience. The (subliminal) message that the child gets is that nothing of value can be derived from the world in which s/he has grown up. The message is that this world, which has hitherto been his/her source of identity, must be discarded if s/he is to make his/her way in the world and make the most of the fruits of education.

An arts-in-education methodology can counteract this influence that the education system has on the child by strengthening or reinforcing his/her connection to lived experience. This it can do in two ways:

1. Enabling the child to be creative by drawing upon local sources—materials and forms of cultural expression—in the classroom;
2. Guiding the child to imaginatively interpret or represent the reality that s/he experiences, which indeed is the purpose of much of artistic endeavour.

The arts in education, instead of positioning the child as a passive recipient of information and knowledge which finds no points of reference in his/her own lived reality—as education in India generally does—positions the child as an active and autonomous subject who investigates his/her reality and exercises his/her imaginative capacities on what s/he has an immediate connection to.

The arts in this way can help growing children to find their own voice instead of speaking in a borrowed voice that the system legitimizes or enforces. It is thus that children may grow into agents who are empowered in the relevant sense, who will be able make decisions about their future informed by their full awareness of natural or founding associations and affiliations, a full consciousness of the values and meanings inscribed in the place from which they come. Put another way, the intervention of the arts in education can promote cultural diversity, counteracting Indian education’s centralized way of defining what a child must learn and how the child must learn. This is how arts education can become a force for diversity, where diversity is understood as committed to accommodating contending interests, positions, preferences and perspectives, or ensuring a level playing field for rival conceptions of the meaningful or worthwhile.

Interestingly, arts education appears as a junction point for a variety of national-level discourses on curricular frameworks (NCF), teacher training programme
(NCFTE), teacher education recommendations (NCTE) and more, especially in its ability to offer a vital link between the vision statement and actual implementation strategies in teacher training curricula as well as classrooms. It is in recognition of this dialogic relationship between the classroom and society that the NCERT has issued a call for “innovative pedagogies [that are] to be grounded not just in learning new games, songs and activities but developing in the teacher a conceptual and lived understanding of all that experiential knowledge and learning has to offer.” To create an environment that can successfully implement the aims of education, it is the teacher who has to be trained in both the ideals of cultural diversity and its implementation strategies first. It is exactly to address the sensitization of the teacher to the idea of a “multiverse,” and to instill a participatory, activity-based classroom practice that IFA launched its arts education project, Kali-Kalisu, where five hundred in-service teachers received training in five forms of art over a course of three years. Kali-Kalisu aimed to inculcate the habits of self-reflection/self-criticism, collaborative learning, social sensitivity, spirit of inquiry and broader commitment to the profession. Following the Kali-Kalisu model, and incorporating a diversity of cultural materials within its content, an Activity-Based Arts Education Curriculum may approach teacher training through the following itinerary:

**Visual Art Education** as a means of communication and expression through a visual language. Visual arts can be used within pedagogies as an expressive, knowledge transferring, explorative and experiential form of learning. Visual art in education is a necessary pedagogical tool that needs to be developed and understood by the learner and teacher as a language system to enable both articulation and expression of their inner thoughts and feelings. Activities include observing everyday visual elements around us, exploring visual sensations e.g. colour, line, form, texture etc., understanding different ways of seeing the world, sight and spatial relationships and visual aesthetics.

**Music Education** that would function as a bonding mechanism in the classroom, and enhances the communication between teachers and students. Music is also an aural experience--the listening session will facilitate an aural experience of different genres of music, instruments, their textures, emotions and characteristics in the light of their cultural, social contexts. Music as a visual experience allows ‘seeing’ through music. By observing everyday sounds around us. Activities include exploring sounds through the body – tapping, clapping, stomping, patting, whispering, shouting etc., understanding the potential of the voice, understanding types of sounds – Noise and Music, Speech and Song, Melody and Rhythm.

**Movement Arts** as a creative expression of the self that facilitates creative and critical thinking abilities through the integration of the developing mind & body in the context of cultural practices. Activities include connecting an element of movement to a feeling, using simple skills to create a dance piece, perform in front of others, team work, making decisions and executing tasks together.
Theatre as a group experience, facilitating processes of learning by which individuals and groups learn about the interconnectedness between their own individual selves, the group, and society as a whole. The insights that are generated through these processes will inform an individual teacher’s practice in diverse contexts. The main focus of the theater is to uncover, and hone, the inherent potential in the teacher to adapt this learning to her own specific context, to become an innovator herself. There are two broad aims of drama for education: one, student-teachers use drama processes as tools for examining themselves and their context, thus generating new knowledge and understanding, and two, to train, and through training enhance some theatre skills that will later help them be creative and enlightened teachers. Activities include games, planned and structured drama exploration exercises designed to first experience and then, deepen social awareness of students, making short plays.