

Redirecting the Role of Performing Arts in Schools for Developing Future Citizens and Fostering Social Change

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Abstract: Social change is the order of the world and it is inevitable for survival of human societies. There can be innumerable agents of social change in a given society. Dance and education constitute two such agents of social change. Dance has historically been used for the purpose of story-telling, spreading awareness and changing mindsets and it has immense capacity to bring about social change. Schools constitute a social setting which again has a great impact on the mindset, attitude and holistic development of the students. Through these years, there has been an emphasis on incorporating performing arts in the schools for educational, recreational and other beneficial purposes. Schools these days have dance as a part of their curriculum. Through this paper the researcher attempts to highlight the existing practice of performing arts in schools today. It has been observed that Schools use these arts just for the sake of annual days and competitions or festivals. Although major educational policies recommend the utilisation of these art forms for creating citizens and fostering social change in schools, the purpose is somewhere lost. Interviews were conducted with 20 teachers to understand how schools today use performing arts and how teachers view the utility of performing arts in schools. The researcher puts forth suggestions for various stakeholders in education and throws light on the need to redirect and rethink the role of performing arts in schools for the purpose of developing future citizens and fostering social change.

Keywords: Social change, mindsets, entertainment, redirection, performing arts.

I. INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, performing arts have been an integral part of our society. From agricultural activities like harvesting to other different festivities like marriage, performing arts have marked various aspects of human life. Whether structured or unstructured, performing arts have inevitably served the purpose of story-telling and spreading across messages. The various Folk and classical dances in India very well portray this aspect. It is a well accepted fact that the capacity of performing arts in bringing changes is immense. Art is an essential part of the social capital of a nation. It helps to build the networks and to establish norms of trust and reciprocity among the citizens across racial and ethnic lines. It aims to improve the quality of life and overall well being (Carter, 2009).

A Canadian survey conducted in 2008 found that 86% of respondents believed art made for more integrated and healthier communities, while 88% thought it had a positive impact on health and well-being (Chinoy, 2017). Art can contribute to enhancement of a person's mental health and help in producing more productive citizens in a society. This in turn would help create a better society.

Where the arts thrive, freedom of expression thrives. Art can directly empower the most vulnerable members of society (Chinoy, 2017). This shows that art can give voice to the most disadvantaged sections of the society and help in creating better lifestyles for them. This stands as an evidence of how performing arts can be a great medium for social change.

In the recent past, there has been an increasing emphasis on the use of performing arts in bringing about changes in mindsets of citizens and hence in fostering social changes. Various artists have stepped into this area of performing arts and they are rethinking over the idea of the social impact of performing arts today.

Schools are a miniature society. Children not only gather information about various subjects and learn the content, but they learn various other things. The entire educational setting of a school has a lot to offer for the students. From seating arrangements to the events organised, children learn a whole lot of things in the school. Schooling has an impact on the child's entire personality. Schooling has a direct effect on children's educational achievement, acquisition of skills, social cognition, and feelings (Sylva, 1994). Schools are majorly responsible for shaping the child's thought process, mindsets, values and moulding the child into a capable citizen of the society. Schools, therefore, constitute an important agency of social change.

Performing arts have proved to be very helpful in the overall development of the children. They enhance awareness and creativity of the children. Children have the opportunity to celebrate the richness and depth of human expression in all of its forms. Through creative expression students learn to comprehend our world better and are therefore better equipped to navigate the challenges they might be faced with (Shelley, 2016).

Since schools are supposed to focus on the overall development of the child and not just on the academics, various national policies in education have advised that performing arts have to be included in the schools and they should be integrated into the curriculum for educational and other beneficial purposes.

As early as 1952-53, the report of the then education commission emphasised the release of creative energy among the students so that they may be able to appreciate cultural heritage and cultivate rich interests, which they can pursue in their leisure and later in life. This has been described as one of the functions of secondary education, which recommends that subjects such as art, craft, music, and dance should be provided a place of honour in the curriculum (Uppal, et.al 2006).

All fields of human endeavour, including arts, crafts, and sports, are valuable to both human and societal advancement, and so should be actively pursued by students in their curricula to achieve holistic development (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019).

This implies that various policies from 1952 till 2019 have emphasised the place of performing arts in developing personality of students and also making them better citizens of the society.

In this sense, today, although schools have incorporated performing arts in their curriculum, there is a need to look at the way performing arts are used in schools. Schools, including private and public and across different boards, have certainly introduced dance, music, theatre for students and they put up shows on various occasions as well wherein students get a platform to learn and perform. But the question is that about the purpose of introducing performing arts in schools. Are we actually using the potentialities of performing arts for the purpose of building citizens and bringing social change?

Hence the objective of this article includes:

- To highlight the existing practice of performing arts in schools
- To find out if there is a need to redirect this practice in schools for betterment
- To suggest ways and means for redirection of performing arts practice in schools

II. METHODOLOGY

The method selected for data collection in this study is Interview method. This method was selected in order to explore some open-ended questions regarding the prevailing practice of performing arts in various schools. Interviews would enable researcher to get more detailed information about each school and the way they employ performing arts in their curriculum. The same would not have been possible by other quantitative or qualitative approaches. Case studies would give idea only about one or two schools. Quantitative tools will not fetch the needed details. Hence interviews were the most suitable method for the study as per the researcher.

1. PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this study are 20 teachers from different schools across Bangalore. Convenient Sampling was used by the researcher. In order to understand the existing ways of practicing performing arts in schools, interviews were conducted with 20 regular teachers belonging to private as well as aided schools in Bangalore. These teachers taught different subjects at their schools and not specifically any particular art form. However, all of them have been part of coordinating major events as well as have observed regular classes of performing arts. They were well aware about the curriculum of all the subjects at the school. The teachers were asked about how their schools use performing arts and what the major purpose for having performing arts in their respective schools was.

III. EXISTING PRACTICE OF PERFORMING ARTS IN SCHOOLS BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

The information revealed through the interviews was not very encouraging. Majority of teachers answered that performing arts were meant only for the purpose of entertainment in annual days, teachers' days and other events. Beyond that performing arts had a little role to play.

"The arts are reduced to tools for enhancing the prestige of the school on occasions like Independence Day, Founder's Day, Annual Day, or during an inspection of the school's progress and working" (Vishal, 2015). The sad truth is that schools use performing arts for the sole purpose of entertainment and not for anything beyond that. Students would perform on some festivals or annual days and that is it. Neither do students learn about their culture, nor do they learn any significant messages through their performances.

A teacher from an aided school emphasised that performing arts were important for holistic development of students and bringing changes in their mindsets as well. However, the school used performing arts only for entertainment purposes and there was no focus on improving students' learning or students' thought processes through performing arts (A. Ashitha, personal communication, August 22, 2019).

Another teacher from a private school mentioned that their school has performing arts only for the purposes of festivals and competitions and that is also very irregular and unstructured. Performing arts are not considered seriously for the purpose of education or social change (P. Chidambaram, Personal communication, August 23, 2019).

The teachers also mentioned that though performing arts are a part of their curriculum, their classes are taken by other subject teachers since students should focus more on science and maths. Hence students do not get a chance to step out of their mundane school routine and their development remains restricted to academics. All teachers felt that performing arts like music, dance and theatre could go a long way in changing students' mindsets and also making them mentally healthier. "Role play and drama in class cannot help enhance learning but could also be used to create awareness on the pressing needs of the time" (M. Fernandez, personal communication, August 23, 2019).

Finally when asked about redirecting the practice of performing arts in schools, all the 20 teachers agreed that there is a need to restructure the way we use performing arts in schools. Its role should certainly go beyond that of entertainment and competitions. The schools need to start from small steps of having role plays in classroom and then go ahead with having entire art education curriculum based on theme of creating better future citizens and fostering social change.

Hence the researcher feels this urgent need to go beyond entertainment and look at redirection of performing arts in schools in order to give a position of honour to performing arts in the curriculum, to develop good citizens and foster social change.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

There is sufficient evidence suggesting that the way schools use performing arts today is not taking us anywhere in terms of change and Well-being. We need redirection of practicing performing arts in schools such that it leads to changes in mindsets of student, making students open minded and global minded and therefore bringing about social change through developing good citizens. The potentialities of performing arts should be recognised and used in desirable ways by all the schools across all the Boards of the country. In order to redirect and rethink the same, the research offers solutions and ways forward:

There has to be a major focus on policy implementation as all the policies advice to practice performing arts for betterment and educational purposes. All educational policies and their recommendations have to be kept in mind by the school administrators and curriculum designers. The bodies inspecting the schools should also make sure if the schools are implementing the policies in the way expected. Inspections can help keep a check on the use of performing arts in schools.

Schools to rethink their policies and they way they view performing arts. They need to revise the way they organise festivals or annual days. These events can have special themes regarding social change. They also need to organise special events for addressing social issues. These events should have music, dance and theatre wherein children bring in their

innovative ideas of presenting the social issue for instance and spreading across the message. More than having events, regular classes also should have an element for building healthier communities through art. Schools should encourage the teachers to integrate performing arts in their regular classes so that performing arts are not labelled as solely being “extra-curricular”. These would contribute to holistic development as well as creating good future citizens.

Teachers recruited for teaching performing arts in schools should have adequate training and experience in order to integrate art and social change. The management should not look only at the qualification of such teachers but also at an overall understanding of the use of performing arts for purposes beyond entertainment. Such teachers can lead the way for students in becoming a global minded person and also becoming sensitive to the issues of the society.

Schools should certainly organise projects wherein students use performing arts for creating awareness and in the process learn. Students can be taken to slums or villages and they can present street theatre or other kinds of performances for creating awareness and spreading messages. Though these projects are taken up by certain schools and institutions they are usually not done with a priority and they are at as being non-core subjects which makes them less important compared to others. More emphasis on the same can help in relocating the position of performing arts.

The number of lectures given for learning any of the performing arts should not be seen as free lectures and taken up by other teachers for covering syllabus in maths and science. Schools should maintain a record of all the lectures given for performing arts and see to it that all grades’ students have learnt the necessary values and messages through performing arts. Students also should be advised to maintain a reflective journal for performing arts lectures wherein they can write about their experiences while learning and presenting a song, dance or play and also about how that experience impacted their thought processes and helped them in becoming a better person.

All schools need to learn from alternative schools and special schools where the teachers are trained to integrate art and art therapies for educational purposes. For instance Ankur School, Gujarat, gives music therapy for the students with intellectual disabilities. Adopting such approaches can also make schools for inclusive and this atmosphere would certainly foster social change.

This idea and study can be taken further in order to implement redirection in all schools possible. Similar studies can be taken up across cities and states in order to look at the existing use of performing arts throughout the country. More studies should be done in order to provide curriculum designs and educational plans that can help in the integration of performing arts and social change in schools. The researcher calls upon policy makers, educationists, experts in the field of performing arts and schools to come up with ways in which the potentialities of performing arts can be used in schools for betterment of humanity.

V. CONCLUSION

Performing arts have immense potential for bringing about social change and promoting well-being. They can help develop good citizens for future. Educational Institutions have a huge impact on the development of a child at every stage and these institutions have made attempt to integrate performing arts in their curriculum for better schooling experiences. Various policies emphasise the integration of performing arts for betterment but do all the schools incorporate performing arts accordingly. To answer this, it was imperative to understand the prevailing status and utilisation of performing arts in Schools. It was observed that schools give a secondary status to subjects like performing arts and also they use performing arts for enhancing prestige of the school through various competitions and annual days. The real essence of placing performing arts is lost and hence there is a need to rethink and re-imagine the role and place of performing arts in educational institutions and also in fostering social change and building better citizens for future. The study has an advantage that it brings the empirical evidence to prove that the use of performing arts does not go beyond entertainment and prestige purposes. However, the limitation is that the study is limited to a few schools of Bangalore and in order to get a better picture of the current situation, it is necessary that such studies are conducted across cities and states and different types of schools. The study will have benefits and implications for teachers, administrators, students, schools, curriculum designers, researchers in the field and society at large. Researcher urges curriculum developers, policy makers and teachers to realise the potential of performing arts and put forth more research on integrating the performing arts in curricula more effectively and alongside develop frameworks to assess the use of arts in various institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher extends heartfelt gratitude to all the teachers who agreed to respond and participate in the interview. The responses given by the teachers are of utmost importance in writing this paper. The researcher also thanks ANKUR SPECIAL SCHOOL in Gujarat which has been quoted in the paper.

The researcher thanks CHRIST (deemed to be University) for giving the opportunity to conduct the conferences and ignite discussions on similar issues as this has been an important factor in writing and completing this research article.

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