

‘NURTURING CREATIVITY THROUGH ART APPRECIATION

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Abstract

Problem statement: Art Education has been given place in the curriculum yet there is a general misconception that the subject Art is of lesser importance and treated as a mere entertaining fringe. The present study looks into this matter. The basic key question, therefore, is-Does process of ‘art appreciation’, a significant component of art education, promote creative aspects of students and facilitate in attaining the educational objectives. It is with reference to Teacher education course. **Approach:** For the study, a workshop on art appreciation was organized and 200 B.Ed. students (pre-service teachers) were taken. Most of these students had studied art only till 8th standard while few of them had no experience of any art class in school. They were hesitant to paint and had lot of misconceptions about art. The workshop included slide show on works of art, discussion and interpretation; viewing and communing with the work in silence with instrumental music in the background; writing the interpretations/ reflections on the displayed paintings of one’s choice in the workshop; and feedback on overall experience. Data was analyzed qualitatively. **Results:** It was concluded that art appreciation promotes, unique, independent, and honest perception; inculcates courage and confidence to express; helps to explore inner self and make symbolic association; integrate ideas; develop feelings, non-verbal expression, joy, peace and appreciation of nature; and involves sharpening of senses. Therefore, art appreciation promotes creative aspects and facilitates in attaining educational objectives.

Keywords: Paintings, joy, meditation, education objectives, communion with self

Introduction

Education starts with acquisition of knowledge and ends with its application. In other words it is a process of expression of all potentials of which a human being is full of. It is believed that human beings are endowed with unique powers which are to be brought out or expressed. Wickiser ,(1957, pp.29) believes that “In fact expression is the culmination of learning, of experiencing; it is completion of the process.” The whole process, in fact, has been cognized as process of creativity. Education enhances this creativity. Art is one of the most important factors of this process of education to promote this creative aspect of human beings. As it is stated that the Sanskrit literature considers a human being incomplete if he is not educated in art and literature. In one of the Sanskrit verses it is said that without art, music and literature a human being is an animal without tail and horns. Mago (2000, pp.4) states, “According to *SukaraNiti Saar*, art was a more complete discipline (to develop a person’s mind) than learning through reading and writing.” Art not only induces positivity in the person who does or the artist but also in the person who see it or is able to commune with it. In reference to this *Ray Niharranjan* states “..... the principal aim of art is to induce unique state of being which is one of pure, impersonal delight by securing first for the artist himself and then for the reader or beholder, a spell of complete detachment from work-a-day life and forgetfulness of selfish interest.”

According to traditional Indian notion not only making of an art work but its proper appreciation was also considered to be the active process. True art work is something which has to be earned by striving for it, by purifying and sharpening one's senses and sensibilities. It is in this sense that if the beholder or viewer is of the same heart as that of the artist than he (viewer) is called 'vidagdha' or 'rasika' in Sanskrit. One great difference between the artist and the viewer is that the latter cannot make the situation which the artist can. Yet there is similarity too, between the two as both have gone through realisation of an identical feeling as a value. Both have gone through the higher state of being and have felt otherworldliness, forgetfulness of selfish interest, and purity etc. In reference to this *Abhinavagupta* states in Sanskrit "nayakasyakavyehsrotuhsamanonubhavah." To him there is not much difference between creation and appreciation of an object, in so far as the experience of the identical feeling at any rate is concerned. *Ray Niharranjan (1984)* has gone to an extent of regarding even the appreciator or the rasika as a creator. The art experience or the rasa experience in west has been called as aesthetic experience. This art experience has been described variously in treatises on Sanskrit poetics as an earthly, shining joy, intense delight, supreme detachment so on and so forth. Therefore, from this standpoint appreciator is also the creator. So not only creation of work of art is important but art appreciation is also equally important.

Though art education has been given place in the curriculum yet there is a general misconception that the subject Art is of lesser importance in comparison to the other regular subjects, such as Mathematics, Science. But it is realised that art should become an important component of learning and not be treated as a mere entertaining fringe. According to National Curriculum Framework 2005 (2006, pp.54-55, 8) it should be made compulsory subject up to class-X. It further states: "Since this is an activity based, experiential subject, it gives scope for observation, imagination and visualisation in the process of creativity. Every individual child has all types of emotions, which need to come out of the child's inner-self; art education helps them in this process."

The present study looks into this matter. The basic key question, therefore, is – Does process of 'art appreciation', the important component of art education, promote creative aspects and facilitates in attaining the educational objectives in students? It is with reference to Teacher education course.

For the study, workshop on art was organised and 200 B.Ed students (pre-service teachers) of different batches. Most of these students had studied art only till 8th standard while few of them had no experience of any art class in school and were hesitant to paint and go through art appreciation task.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were-

1. To make the subjects observe, perceive, concentrate, symbolically associate, integrate ideas and meditate.
2. To spur the imagination and create an environment for new ideas and feelings to emerge.
3. To motivate and encourage subjects to express 'felt ideas' or experiences freely, confidently and feel relaxed.

Method

To achieve the above mentioned objectives, workshop was divided into following four phases, keeping in mind their existing level of understanding:

Phase I : Discussion on Art

Phase II : Slide Show

Phase III : Viewing the displayed paintings and writing the interpretations/reflections on paintings and feedback on the workshop

Phase IV :Analysis of the interpretations/reflections on paintings and feedback on the workshop

Phase I: Discussion on Art

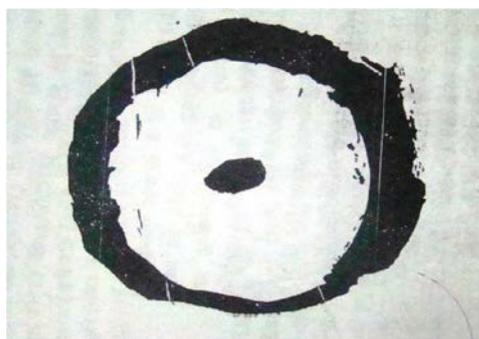
An introduction about Art was given, which mainly focused on the meaning of Art; briefly the ‘principles and the elements of art’ and also focused on the key questions such as, why it is important to view works of art and what relevance it has in our life. Clarifications to general misconceptions and questions were given such as:

- Art is all about just making the things in a realistic way.
- I cannot draw a single straight line so I am not creative.
- Not everybody has the creative power.
- How to view/understand works of art?

Phase II: Slide Show



by Susmita Lakhyani, oil on canvas,
(communion of spirits)
Figure 1



by 2 1/2 years child,
(me in my house)
Figure 2

After some discussion and clarification of misconceptions the subjects were shown the works of different artists (including child art) in the form of slides. During the slide show, the subjects were asked to share their interpretations or ideas or what they felt about a particular work of art on screen. Simultaneously (in few slides) the artist's idea behind the creation was discussed. The subjects interpreted the slides in their own way and shared it confidently. For example **Figure 1** titled ‘communion of spirits’ by the artist (based on the idea: an angel is urging the spirits saying “In the silence of night I offer you my wings to come across the sea.” An angel wants the sleeping souls to get awakened to the ultimate truth.) was interpreted by the subjects in different ways as:

- “The basic thing I noticed in the picture is the use of colour such that a three dimensional effect is originating through the shades of the waves. It seems as if these waves are going to come out of it. The moon shown in the picture is shining brightly. The painting gives me the feeling as all of us will have to go to heaven in the end and we will have to go and give the reply to each question asked by the God and explain our deeds in the words.”
- “This painting appealed to me as this is showing a calm death. This really shows me or evokes in me the kind of imagination as if I am dead and lying calmly. It shows that an angel has come to take my soul and that soul has merged into the angel. This painting is showing me what I want to be after my death. The presence of a crescent moon is also showering a cool effect.”
- “In the background are misty hills, perhaps the sand dunes of a desert on a night illuminated by the shining rays of a moon. In the foreground is a man, asleep. Out of him emerges the dream of an angel. The scene is very soothing.”
- “To me this painting signifies a dream. The white lying down figure is sleeping whose consciousness escapes into that realm of fantasy where even though things look familiar, they

are not. The green hills have an unreal quality to them, as does the carved crescent moon. The colours flow into each other in the creation of the background, the moon and the earth. In many ways this painting reflects freedom. The freedom one acquires in the most intense dreams. The freedom to explore, be and fly.”

- “I found nice colour combinations. And the meaning it convey really appeals to me, that whatever height you may achieve in your life and career, that too high you might have been flying, but still your shadow will lie on the ground. No one should forget one's groundings.”

The child who painted **Figure 2** expressed it as ‘me in my house’ stated *Jeswani (1966, pp.15)*. It was interpreted in the workshop as a ‘hole’, ‘cycle tyre’, ‘face’, ‘a patch on moon’, ‘cross section of tree trunk’, ‘target point’ and so on.

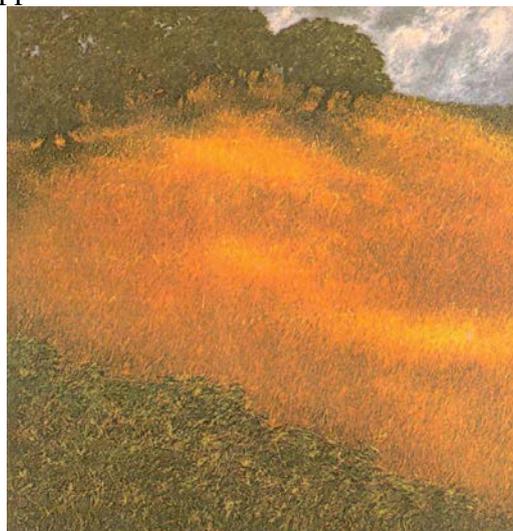
Phase III: (a)Viewing the displayed paintings, writing the interpretation of paintings(b) Feedback on attending the workshop

(a)Viewing the displayed paintings, writing the interpretation of paintings

After the viewing of the slides, 23 prints of the paintings were displayed with the instrumental music in the background and the subjects were asked to write about the painting they liked the with the most. The following are the extracts from the subjects’ written observation of paintings they (subjects) liked the most.

The subjects after viewing. **Fig. 3** interpreted it as :

- “The picture portrays a happy situation where there is no helplessness. Everything seems to be pleasing enough. The sloppy terraced fields are soothing enough.”
- “It is the painting of a sun set without the sun in the picture. There is darkness around the big trees. The golden rays of the setting sun falls on the field, making it red in colour. It also depicts the rainy season. A bit of sky, which is visible, is filled with dark clouds.”
- In this painting a jungle scene is shown; there are lot of dense trees, and also there is dry grass and green grass depicted. Far off mountains are also shown. Through this painting one can understand nature, that how nice a dense green area looks and how sad nature looks without that dense greenery. In this painting on one side happiness is shown through greenery and sadness through dry grass. I really liked the colour selection, it seems to be so natural the way they are used. The way it has been composed is also appreciable.”

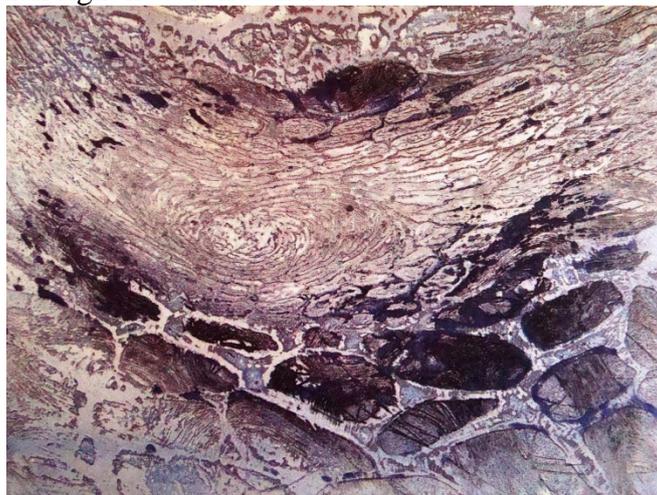


by Paramjit SinghFig. 3

- “It seems as it is a night time and an isolated place. It’s a scary place somewhere in Punjab. I can feel that fear after seeing it, but some how I like this painting.”

Fig. 4 brought-out the following interpretations:

- “This painting seems as if it shows the skin of a dinosaur.”
- “There seems to be concentration of river in between. It is catching my attention as the surrounding is rough. I think life is similar to this. Here the river is like hope and the stones are like obstacles.”
- “Represents anatomy of some tissue with smaller cells inside and large big cells outside.”
- “It seems as if the land, after volcanic eruptions, is shown. But, some how, I like this painting because of its forms used and it seems to me that it talks about after effects of something which right now is not there.”



by Krishen Reddy Fig. 4

- “I am mystified by the meaning that the artist wants to express. Each time you see it, you find a different meaning. This keeps challenging the imagination
After writing the interpretations/reflections on the paintings subjects wrote about their experience of going through the paintings, the overall feedback of attending the workshop.

(b) Feedback on attending the workshop

After writing the reflections on displayed paintings, subjects were asked to share their experience of attending the workshop. Some of the extracts are as under:

- “I have had, for the first time, this kind of experience in my whole life. Earlier, I felt no connectivity with art and it was alien to me but, now, I’ve realized that really ‘art is a part of life’ and there is a need to recognize it. It doesn’t mean photocopying something as it is, but it means to interpret one’s feeling with colours in very simple and lucid way. I experienced inner peace during the workshop.”
- “It gave me a chance to meet myself and somehow I came to know that what I want, some day, may be that because inner peace has no face, type, choice. It can meet you anywhere, no where or everywhere. Another thing I came to know that inner desires can be fulfilled through a different medium called a ‘blank canvas’ on which you can express yourself without any limitation or hesitation, without any boundaries or restrictions.”
- “After seeing those slides of paintings and participating in the discussion I’ve started appreciating art.....It has been a source of pleasure and content. I am feeling inspired to draw my thoughts and feelings on the paper, I am really feeling relieved and relaxed.”

- “While attending the workshop nothing was there in my mind: no assignment, no house hold things. Truly this was an overwhelming opportunity.”
- “I enjoyed viewing the paintings you showed, I was able to guess who the painter could be, and it turned out to be right, that was wonderful. I never thought I would be able to recognize painters from paintings.”
- “Something was bothering me, I got a chance to move away from those, thanks for this meditative experience. I am now more at peace within myself....”
- “.....forgot the world outside and was led to a different place where I was alone with my thoughts and thus was able to reflect my experience and expression in the form of writing reflections on painting.”
- “Through this my imagination got some pause and I also thought something unique. I am so happy.”
- It was a moment for me where I can evaluate my artistic expression on my own.”
- “All my hidden feelings, thoughts and expression got a creative outlet.”
- “It was a moment to relax and just let go of your emotions. I really enjoyed myself.”
- “I enjoyed while seeing the paintings more then I expected.”
- “Wonderful stress bursting experience... More of these workshops should be there to release weeklong bottled up frustrations.”
- “This was a new, but great experience for me. I found a new sense of art in me.”
- “It seemed to me that I would get bored in this workshop. I didn’t want to come, but, still, I came to this workshop. But, as soon as I entered, the environment and paintings seemed to be very enchanting and spured my imagination.”
- “This has been an unforgettable experience for me to sit, forget the world ... express... It was an out of the body experience.”
- “After seeing the slides and discussions etc. a lot of ideas started flowing in my mind. I started feeling to draw although I had never painted and don’t know how to draw..... From now on, I would like to do paintings...”
- “It was an awesome, amazing experience, especially for a science student like me who has never been exposed to such a workshop. Helped in sensitizing me towards art and artists and feel the creativity inside me.”
- “It was a very different experience, Visuals just start flowing through your mind... Very Relaxing.”

Phase IV: .Analysis of the interpretations/reflections on paintings and the feedback on workkshop

The interpretations were analysed on following aspects :

- Integration of Idea
- Originality
- Perception
- Way of Seeing
- Expression
- Uniqueness
- Symbolic Association

It can be observed that the subjects felt: relaxed; satisfied; fresh; feeling of other worldliness; contented; inner peace; joy; happy; self realization; inspired, motivated and confident to create; sense of freedom; no limitations, no boundaries and no hesitations; emergence of new ideas and imagination; and awareness of inner potentials. The subjects felt the environment inspiring and motivating which lead many ideas and imagination flow in them.

It was observed that the subjects verbally expressed their ‘felt ideas’ and ‘honest interpretations’, while the slides were being discussed. Discussion on the meaning of art and misconceptions brought confidence in them to share their interpretations on the works of art viewed.

In the beginning of the workshop, during the discussion, the subjects shared that they were not able to understand work of art; didn’t know how to view it; couldn’t think beyond the conventional forms of mountains; huts; sceneries with a boat and sun; and conventional geometrical or floral designs in the context of art. But, it was analyzed from their interpretations of the works of art (which they did after discussions and silently viewing of slides) that they were able to think beyond the conventional ideas and they expressed what they really felt and experienced. It was observed that the same painting was interpreted in a very different way by different subjects. Almost all the interpretations were different. The extracts reflected that the experience of viewing work of art and discussion on art made the subjects go through.

- Observation.
- Interpretation.
- Development of original idea.
- Appreciation of art in terms of colour, texture, composition, balance etc.
- Sensitivity.
- Integration of idea.
- Symbolic association.
- Development of feeling.
- Understanding of non-verbal expression.
- A unique way of seeing.
- Independence/self reliance.
- Truthful and honest expression.
- Exploration of self.

Conclusion

Art experience/art appreciation leads the subjects to think in an independent, unique and honest way. It involved inculcation of courage and confidence to express what truly came to their mind. It helped them to explore their inner-self, make symbolic association; integrate ideas and develop feelings, non – verbal expression and appreciation of nature. It involved the sharpening of senses. Overall, it can be concluded that art experience/appreciation promotes creative aspects in the subjects, while, at the same time, facilitates the attainment of educational objectives.

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