

Integrating Performing Arts in Classroom Pedagogy

~ Pritha Chakrabarti



The idea of including music, dance or theatre in the classroom often leads to concerns from subject teachers since these are activities that are marked out as extra-curricular, that is, activities that are beyond the scope of regular education. Since traditionally these activities were either done outside class hours, or even at the cost of losing class hours, they were never considered a possible teaching-learning tool, especially in middle school and above. At best, they were given some space in the English classroom, at worst, they were frowned upon as a waste of precious time. This is exactly the kind of misconception that the art-integrated pedagogic approach tries to address, where these subjects that were hitherto considered “extra” or add-on to the classroom teaching-learning experience, gets integrated within the pedagogic practices. This may be a cause of concern to a lot of teachers who are already worried about the loss of class hours due to the pandemic and are struggling with the online shift to education. However, I would argue that it is these so-called “extra-curricular” or “co-curricular” activities that have the potential to turn an offline as well as an online classroom into a joyful experience for the students while building their creative and critical faculties.

One might argue that art-integration at school level is not a new thing and some schools have long been accommodating subjects such as Art and Craft, Music and Dance within their timetable. However, it is important to note here that an art-



integrated pedagogy does not espouse teaching of these art forms as part of the curriculum, rather as a method of teaching History, Geography, Literature, or, even Sciences. The NEP 2020 defines art-integration as a “cross-curricular pedagogical approach that utilizes various aspects and forms of art and culture as the basis for learning of concepts across subjects.” The policy promises that such an approach would aid in the



“experiential learning” of students and help in linking education to culture (NEP 2020: 12). Such a method could help inculcate creativity among students, foster team spirit and collaborative work, improve recall value of content, build observation skills as well as the skill to initiate debates and discussions, make connections between ideas, and most importantly, be kind, empathetic and responsible citizens of tomorrow. While many of these are important 21st century skills that we need to instil in our students, they also pave the way for teachers to teach students to question existing knowledge and create new knowledge. Since we live in an age where information is available literally at our fingertips (the word “digit”, or fingers, is embedded in the word, “digital”), it is crucial that our students not only learn to reproduce existing knowledge but also produce their own. This is exactly where integrating art into pedagogy can help make students engage more deeply with the content of the textbook and learn to question existing concepts in order to produce their own.

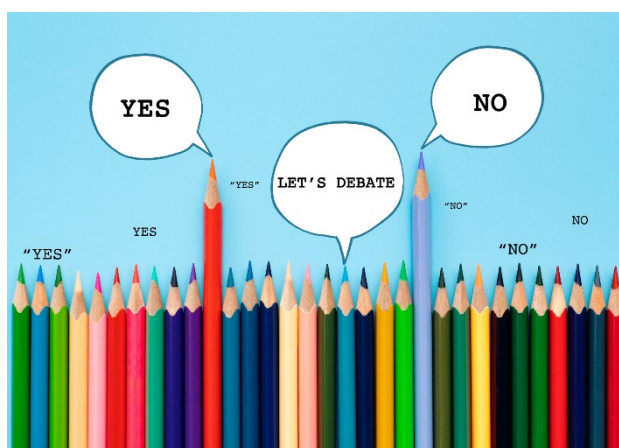
Here is an instance of integrating art in a Social Science classroom of Grade 7 where students are learning about medieval India. They are referring to the chapter, “Cities, Traders, and Craftspeople” in [Landmark](#), which informs them, among other things, about the different ports of Surat, Masulipatnam and Hampi, and traces the historical development of trade in these towns.

Traditionally, subject teachers would have the students commit to memory the entire section and these would possibly appear as individual short notes or a long answer on trade ports of medieval India in the exam paper. Those who are enthusiastic and have the time may point out the location of these port cities in the map, or the really experimental ones may even plan a field trip if logistics permit them. Now, enter art-integration.

Teacher nominates three student volunteers to act as tradespeople from the medieval times (they are free to dress accordingly, if possible) who narrate their experiences of

visiting these ports. In the process, they refer to the material in the text to describe the places, the people and the products they exchanged in the port. A separate set of volunteers are invited to write the script. Once enacted, the existing words of the text come alive in front of the eyes of the students making it easy to recall the text at the time of their assessment. Such an activity explores the creativity of the students, teaches them to work in collaboration with each other, and be mindful of historical specificities. Thus, the existing knowledge of the text becomes a part of their lived experience.

Let us take this experiment a little forward and see how this approach can help students build skills of producing new knowledge, in other words, their critical and analytical skills. What if the three tradespeople from medieval India time travelled to the current timeline? What would they see in these port towns? Teacher nominates a group of students to research online about these towns and share their material with the set of students who are acting as medieval tradespeople. Budding writers in the class volunteer to write a skit on a conversation between these people on what they see of their ports today. Even a mock TV debate could be organized with the teacher as the moderator, each port's representative vying to establish their port as the best. The teacher could initiate a discussion on what makes Surat a burgeoning trade centre in present day India while Masulipatnam and Hampi are reduced to heritage sites of little economic consequence in



the Indian economy. As homework, the students are asked to conduct an interview of someone they know who has conducted business or worked in two different cities in India to understand what makes a city ideal for business today. This could lead to an assessed task to write an essay on the same topic or even a group project to formulate a policy to revive ports like Masulipatnam! What a little bit of art-integration can therefore do, is to open up a host of opportunities for the students to critically engage with the subject they are studying and pay attention to concepts such as the relation between economy and politics, beyond the mere information that the text offers.

But is art-integration an easy process?

Integrating art into our teaching process can be easy. What is however important to note is the level of comfort students and teachers share with art-integration in their class activities. It is a common misconception to treat performing arts as something that requires separate training. From the point of view of teachers, it is important to understand that teaching as a profession includes various kinds of performance. As

teachers, we sometimes act as strict disciplinarians, sometimes as understanding and kind guardians. While we speak in class we pay attention, consciously or unconsciously, to voice modulation, to the energy we bring to our classrooms that ensures a student sitting in the last bench does not get distracted. It is no easy feat to capture the attention of a classroom full of young children and as teachers we have already mastered this performance skill. If teachers extend their performance skills and encourage students to do the same by planning activities that will help learners embody the content they are consuming in their textbooks, it would not be difficult to integrate art into the classroom pedagogy. As for students, it is important to break down the activities into smaller tasks which require various skills: writing, research, acting, singing, debating, etc., and to seek volunteers from students. This ensures that those who are uncomfortable performing in front of a class are not forced to do so. At the same time, it is important to not judge these performances by their aesthetic standards. One must remember that this is a subject classroom and not one of performing arts and access to such skills is a matter of cultural capital and privilege. So the students' ability to convey and communicate a concept should be given more importance over aesthetic quality while assessing or even appreciating such performances in class.

Once teachers begin to pay attention to these details, art-integration can help create a lively classroom environment where students learn to collaborate with each other and work together rather than look at their peers as their competition. This inculcates the joy of learning among students who then do not treat the text as something external to their lives but as a part of their lived experience. This is the essence of “experiential learning” that art-integration helps to achieve, as promised by the NEP 2020. While teachers and educators try to incorporate performing arts into the classroom, they must also be mindful that this should not prove to be an additional burden to parents and students by taking up extra dance, theatre or music classes. The inclusion of fine arts or drawing classes in the 1990s already saw the proliferation of art schools in every locality where children were sent to at least once a week, irrespective of their interest in art. This new attempt at integration of performing arts should not do the same. Let art be integrated within our subject to make the concepts come alive, and not act as a separate subject to be accommodated in the child's already hectic schedule.

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Lesson Plan: Integrating Performing Arts in Classroom Pedagogy

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In the main article, you have seen a case study of an instance where a teacher is introducing experiential learning through art-integrated activity-based exercises in her classroom. Here is a detailed lesson plan on a similar exercise.

Lesson: Refer to the chapter, “Work is Worship” in [Hello, Earth!](#) Book 5 (pages 33-35). It introduces students to professionals from various fields and informs them of the role they play in our daily lives.

Lesson Objectives:

- Inculcate creativity
- Foster team spirit and collaborative work
- Improve recall value of content about the different kinds of work that the various professionals do
- Initiate debates and discussions
- Help in making connections between ideas
- Build observation skills
- Learn to be kind, empathetic and responsible

Ask for volunteers to play the role of the plumber (P) and the person (A) who needs help.

Here is an extract from the dialogue.

A: I am having some plumbing problems and need them fixed urgently.

P: What exactly is wrong with the plumbing?

A: The tap in my bathroom is **leaking**.

P: Are there any problems with the plumbing in the kitchen?

A: Both the kitchen and the bathroom **drains are clogged**.

P: How long have you had these problems?

A: It has been going on for a while, but just started to get worse this morning.

P: I will come and take a look at the problem. Will you be home this afternoon?

A: Yes, I will be home this afternoon.

P: Fine. I will be there around 2:00.



Now invite students in pairs of two to write out a script in a shared Google Doc. Ask the students to write a dialogue using the words or phrases “tap is leaking”, “drainage”, “laying pipes”. This can also be done for various other professions like electrician, doctor, carpenter, painter, etc. in pairs of two. The words and phrases used in the text to describe the work of these professionals can be used to write the script.

Student A: Imagine you are Raju, the plumber, who has been called to fix a problem in the toilet by Rahul.
Hello! I am Raju. I can fix every plumbing problem.



Student B: Imagine you are Rahul whose toilet has a leaky tap and needs the help of Raju, the plumber.

Hi! I am Rahul. The tap in my toilet has been leaking since this morning and I need immediate help!

Raju rings the bell.

Rahul: That must be the plumber. Finally! [Opens door]

Raju: Hello! I am Raju. You called about a plumbing issue.

Ask students to complete this dialogue.

Rahul:

Raju:

Rahul:

Raju:

Rahul:

Raju:

Rahul:



Raju:

Rahul:

Raju:

Rahul:

Raju:

Rahul: Thank you so much for your help, Raju!

What did the lesson help us achieve so far?

It helped us build the following skills in our students:

- Creativity
- Imagination
- Writing
- Language and Communication
- Experiential learning.

Now let's see what happens when performing arts is incorporated into this lesson.

Activity 1: Nominate two students to enact the dialogue/conversation that the first pair has come up with in the form of a skit. These could be variations of conversations with plumber, electrician, doctor, painter, carpenter, etc. In case of online scenarios, encourage students to record themselves using tools like G-meet videos. For reference see: [Rhymes on Professions](#)

Activity 2: Introduce popular forms of expressions like riddles and songs. Encourage students to create riddles as songs to indicate the work each of them performs. This is particularly useful for similar modules taught in lower grades. Use tunes from rhymes with which the students are already familiar. Try this out to the tune of *Wheels on the bus go round and round*:

*I am your buddy who fixes your tap and/
Checks them for leaks, keeps them first class/
I fix your drain and lay your pipe work,
Who am I, tell me, o' dear?*

What did this lesson help us achieve?

- Inculcate creativity through writing, acting, and imagination.
- Foster team spirit and collaboration through group work.
- Improve recall value of content – students will easily remember the task performed by each professional.
- Initiate debates and discussions:
 - Do we speak to our plumbers in English?
 - Which professionals speak in English?
 - Should our conversations/dialogues include some local or regional terminology and expression?
- Help make connections between ideas, like equality of respect towards all professionals, irrespective of their caste and the work they do.
- Build observation skills:
Ask your students to observe how their parents talk to the plumber/carpenter, etc. Ask probing questions to help them identify whether there is any difference in what they have just learnt and what they see at home.
- To be kind, empathetic and responsible:
Your students learn to look at the work by putting themselves in someone else's shoes!

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Commix (verb)

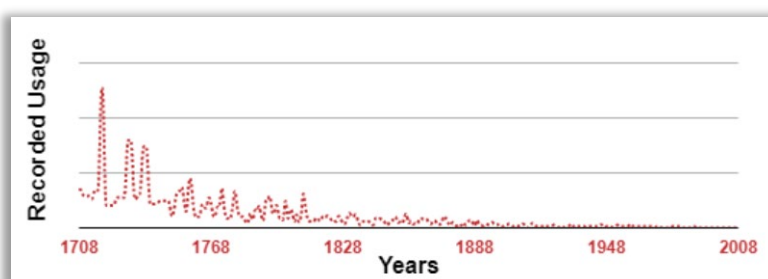


Pronunciation: /kɒ'mɪks/

Meaning: (archaic) to mix or mingle

Origin and additional information: The word's origin is traced as a back formation from Late Middle English (as the past participle *commixt*) and from Latin "*commixtus*", which is the past participle of *com-* 'together with' + *mixtus* 'mixed'.

Word section: The word "*commix*" is considered archaic in present day usage. The first known use of "*commix*" was in the 15th century in the transitive verb form of its meaning (to become mingled or blended). The word shares an etymological history with its synonym "*mix*". Used in the verb form, "*mix*" is a Middle English, back-formation from Anglo-French *mixte*, from Latin *mixtus*, past participle of *miscēre* to mix; akin to Greek *mignynai* to mix.



Usage:

1. *They found that gold was more abundant in Africa. However, it was commixed with soil and rocks, and had to be separated.*

(Source: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/commix>)

2. *This man will harass the civilized world with an insupportable despotism: he will confound and **commix** all things spiritual and temporal.*

[Source: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend* (1809)]

3. *Was it necessary that the active gloom of such a tyrant of a father, should **commix** with such a passive sweetness of a will-less mother, to produce a constancy, an equanimity, a steadiness in the daughter, which never woman before could boast of?*

[Source: Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (1748)]