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**PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY IN CLASSROOM THROUGH
ART INTEGRATED LEARNING PEDAGOGY AT PRIMARY
LEVEL**

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Abstract

Art Integrated learning pedagogy (AIL) is a child centric and innovative approach of teaching and learning which leads to creating a joyful and engaging classroom environment. This

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pedagogy is being used effectively at primary and upper primary levels in the school situation. There is ample research that has established its effectiveness in the learning process. Engaging children in different art activities leads to involvement of most of their senses which leads to better engagement in those activities. When these art experiences are connected with learning of a concept, it results in better understanding and learning of that concept.

As individuals we all have different abilities and capacities. Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence has talked about different types intelligences that we may possess in different amounts. In our classrooms also, as teachers we have observed that the children we work with possess varied mental, emotional and physical capacities and have different styles of learning. Now, with such differences in the classroom, one single approach to teaching-learning cannot be justified. Teachers must think of ways of cater to the learning needs of all students in the class.

Art integrated Learning approach is one such approach to teaching and learning that caters to differing learning styles of students as well as provides holistic learning experience to the students. Globally a lot of work in this area has been done in recent times and at national level the 'National Council of Educational Research and Training' (NCERT) has also pioneered in experimenting and implementing the benefits and effectiveness of this pedagogy at school level and developed comprehensive guidelines and a framework for the Art Integrated Learning pedagogy to create an atmosphere of "experiential and joyful learning" in the classroom situation.

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Based on practical experience of implementing AIL in primary classes and observing its benefits for the primary class learners, this paper makes an attempt to build an understanding of the concept of ‘Art Integrated Learning’ as a pedagogical tool, its impact in the holistic development and learning of students at primary level, its important role in promoting inclusivity in primary classroom along with the National level policy interventions being done to promote this pedagogy in schools.

Keywords: Multiple Intelligence, Individual differences, Joyful and experiential learning, Art forms, Art Integrated Learning and Inclusion.

Introduction:

Children attending school at primary level are in the age group 6-10 years. Developmentally they are in the stage of concrete operations of cognitive development. This is the stage when children learn through concrete experiences. If we observe children of this age group, we will find that they are energetic, curious, want to experiment, love talking to each other, playful and have many questions. Even though children in a particular age group have common developmental status, but still there may be differences in their potential due to varied reasons. These may be due to social, economic, regional, developmental, emotional or psychological reasons. As teachers we have to be sensitive towards the varied needs and capacities of children and try to provide such environment and learning opportunities to them so that each one of them learns.

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Objectives:

1. To understand the importance of integrating Arts in classroom teaching learning process.
2. To know the benefits of implementing this pedagogy in promoting learning in inclusive classroom.

Why Arts in our classrooms?

The Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory by Howard Gardner has suggested that all people do not have same intellectual capacity rather they have many types of intelligences. Gardner's theory of Multiple intelligence discusses about eight types intelligences, namely interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual, spatial, logical-mathematical, musical, kinesthetic and naturalistic. Due to these different intellectual capacities we learn in different ways. According to Gardner, since we have different intellectual capacities, therefore no one way of teaching will fit all. Classroom teaching should be child centric and focused on the individual learning needs and style of each student. Hence, teachers must plan their teaching in such a manner that the teaching learning process takes as per the cognitive, emotional, physical capacities of children and the way children want to learn.

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There is ample research to support that arts should be an essential component of school curriculum. Arts provides students the opportunity of free expression. It engages their different senses, gives vent to their energies and helps develop the creative potential. Engagement in any art activity provides students opportunity to express their ideas and emotions freely and also sharpens their observation skill. The research studies have already established better student engagement in the learning process, motivation and better school results.

The NCF 2005 has recommended that, “Art as a subject at all stages covering all four major spheres, i.e. music, dance, visual arts and theatre...We must bring the arts squarely into the domain of the curricular, infusing them in all areas of learning while giving them an identity of their own at relevant stages”. (NCF, 2005).

Based on the recommendations of NCF 2005, the Position paper, “Arts, Music, dance and Theatre”, (NCERT, 2006), has also recommended the use of Arts in school curriculum and suggested that, “Arts education should be made compulsory up to class X”. Further it adds that “arts education should be an enjoyable, experiential learning process for free expression of children.”

Further reiterating the important role of arts in education, the Department of Arts and Aesthetics (DEAA, NCERT) initiated a pilot study in collaboration with DIET Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi, in which the in-service primary teachers of district west SDMC schools were intensively trained in the use of Art Integrated Learning pedagogy in classroom. After the ten day long intensive training, the teachers had to implement this pedagogy in their classrooms

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with primary children. For in-service training of teachers in AIL pedagogy, a Teachers' Handbook Package for AIL containing ten modules has also been developed by the DEEA, NCERT.

A follow up study of impact of AIL on children's learning and development was also later done which gave positive results about with respect to students' overall personality development besides academic performance. The observations showed that there was greater classroom engagement of students in the classroom with better participation, resourcefulness, creativity, collaboration, communication and confidence etc. teachers also felt that the classroom environment had become more lively and joyful and student attendance had improved considerably.

Very recently, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has also recommended that, "CBSE schools must adopt and adapt Arts in all its forms, as an integral part of teaching-learning process." In its document, "Art Integration-Towards Experiential Learning", (2019) it is mentioned that, "when Art is integrated with education, it helps the child apply art based enquiry, investigation and exploration, critical thinking and creativity for a deeper understanding of the concepts/topics....it makes the learning process experiential andteaching and learning process joyful". (CBSE, Art Integration: Towards Experiential Learning, 2019).

Concept and importance of Art Integrated Learning (AIL)

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Art Integrated Learning is a pedagogical approach which is based on carrying out the teaching-learning process ‘through the arts’ and ‘with the arts’. It is a process where arts become the medium of teaching-learning in classroom. Various curricular concepts are learnt by students when they are engaged in an art activity and that art activity becomes the medium of learning a particular concept.

The Kennedy Centre offers a comprehensive definition of Arts Integration, “Arts Integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both”. (artsedsearch.org)

AIL provides children with opportunities to explore, experience, express and learn. The whole process of engaging students in an art activity and then connecting that experience with learning, makes the whole process a joyful experience for students. Learning through arts also makes the learning process holistic in nature as it involves all three domains viz, the cognitive, psychomotor and affective.

To exemplify, clay modelling as an art form can be used to enable class II students learn about the concept of birds and animals around them. For this, the teacher can begin by engaging students in playing with clay and prepare birds and animals, using clay, that they have seen around them based on their observations. As the students engage in this art based activity, they will not only enjoy the process of playing creatively with clay but also gain other benefits from this activity. Through engagement in this activity the fine motor coordination of their hands will

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develop as they manipulate clay with fingers, giving it a shape and reshaping it to create something new. Besides this, while recalling the birds and animals seen by them, their observation skill and imagination will sharpen and while working with peers social, emotional and language development also take place. And when they share with class what they have made boosts their confidence. Thus, it can be concluded that learning through arts has benefits beyond only learning a concept by the students. Once, all the students are done with this activity, teacher can then continue teaching the concept through discussion, sharing of children's experiences, showing samples from students' work and also providing space in class for display of each student's work so that everyone can see the variety that has been created by all of them together.

Types of art forms

There are so many types of art forms. These can be broadly categorized into visual and performing art forms. Both these categories of art forms are used to express or convey some message.

Visual art is a medium of expressing through visual means. The art form may be two dimensional or three dimensional. This category may include the art forms like drawing, painting, colouring, collage making, photography, sculpture making, clay modelling, paper craft, print making etc.

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Similarly Performing arts are those art forms in which the performers use some object, their body, voices and expressions to convey some message. Some of these art forms are like singing songs, poetry, dance, drama, storytelling, music, puppetry, miming, role play etc.

Teachers can use different visual and performing art forms in the class to enable students to learn curricular concepts of different subjects. While planning for a AIL based lesson, the teacher should select a particular art form on the basis of the age group of students, their interest and also the suitability of connecting the art experience with the concept to be taught.

But it must be cautioned here that it is not necessary that in a class all the content of different subjects should be taught only through art experiences. Teacher has to be careful and sensitive towards this and should use AIL based pedagogy only as and when it is possible.

Promoting inclusivity in classroom through AIL

Arts integration in classroom is proven to be instrumental in catering to all children with varied capacities and learning styles. Recent research studies have shown the impact of the arts on development and learning of concepts of different subjects among children with special needs. Integration of arts in teaching learning process creates more possibilities for all children who are included. In her review of research, A.H. Robinson (2013) found the positive effects of role of arts integration with students with special needs and disadvantaged backgrounds like, students felt more valued, they had better academic motivation, improved self-efficacy, better self-regulatory behaviours and the use of learning strategies. (Robinson, 2013).

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Most of the activities based on art integration are collaborative in nature which give students chance to work together and learn together. This collaborative effort provides children with disabilities and others to interact with each other that helps develop communication and social skills. Art integration has proven to be beneficial on many levels for special needs students. According to Anne Minnich-Beck, director of education at the Indianapolis Art center, “Art is a great way for special needs kids to find success in life”. Art helps these students in improving their self-expression, life skills, body coordination and literacy. In a published study by the John F. Kennedy center for Performing Arts, it has been found that special needs students develop an understanding of their cultural identities through art. Similarly, the Center for Arts education while working with autistic children have revealed that art education is beneficial to help them improve their behavior.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of researches done to study the impact of AIL pedagogy in classroom and recommendations of our national policy documents, it can be concluded that use of AIL pedagogy in our classrooms especially at primary level will definitely help in making the classrooms more lively, joyful, energetic and more inclusive. Teachers’ use of this pedagogy in their classes will definitely go a long way in laying a strong foundation of students’ learning and love for learning.

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