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How Art Develops Children's Critical Abilities

Deepshika Khaitan

Art to a layman means the picture he sees in the magazine or poster or canvas. That is not true. That is only the image, Art is much more.

What is Art ?

It is a holistic visual experience involving a multi – sensory dimension. If for understanding we break it up into the various senses involved then we are talking of:

- the visual experience via the eyes
- the motor experience of hand-eye coordination needed to reproduce what is seen.
- the cognitive experience which breaks down this image in our mind to be able to understand the shape, colour, size, subject etc.
- the emotional experience which is your individual reaction to an image – and that is what distinguishes a mediocre painting from a masterpiece. When collectively a work draws an emotional reaction from everyone it becomes a “MONALISA”

My interest in art dates back to the first time I formally started studying the subject in standard IX in 1995, when we were given the option of choosing art as a subject to appear for ICSE Examinations.

Having completed school, I pursued my interest in art by joining the Fine Arts Department, in Stella Maris College, Chennai where I graduated with honours in History of Art, Drawing and Painting.

Moving to Kolkata, after marriage, I soon began teaching art to children. It was not a planned or thought out decision to teach, but happened by

chance. I still remember, some friends who happened to see my works hanging on the walls insisted that I start teaching art, maybe even begin with their children.. After much resistance, I agreed, I was a bit nervous to begin with, but the children took me by pleasant surprise.

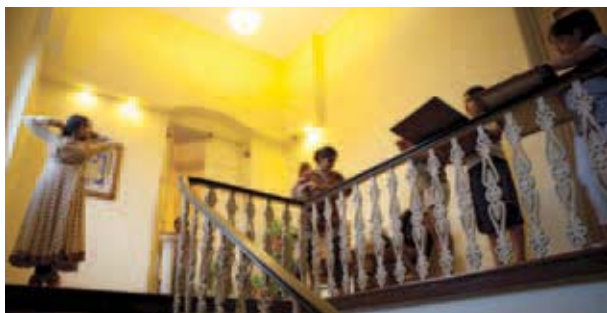
Art fosters creativity and thought. Children are very receptive and sensitive by nature, and with exposure and attention to detail, are able to recreate the stimuli as they see it.

Young minds feel confident and happy through little achievements in their art work.

For example sometime back in the classroom we were talking about world unrest and terror. The children expressed their feelings through the medium of painting. Works created were thought provoking and individualistic.

Similarly, a professional Kathak dancer posed for the children as they sketched her





The Creativity that flowed and the ability to take on and develop a subject after an initial stimuli is reflected in the works above.

Another point that I would like to mention is the use of colour. Children from an early age start associating different colours with different emotions. For eg. Red with anger, white with peace, use of warm colours like yellows and oranges for summers and cool colours like blues and greens for winters. **The Ability to correlate is developed.**

Art often proves to be a catalyst for young imagination. It is we who distinguish between the PAINTER and the WRITER but the young often invent their own story to complete a picture; “The little girl must be awaiting her mother....Maybe he has a worried look because he sees danger....”

The younger children enjoy creating their own imaginary character or animal, giving it a name and making it as realistic as possible.

The sub conscious mind is tapped. After studying the works of famous surrealist artist, children represented the extremities in human nature. Often children enjoy recollecting their dreams and putting them on paper.

Art captures motion. A prime example of this is seen in the movies. Wherein initially pictures were drawn and then made to move. Similarly children were made to capture wind on canvas, therefore evoking their sense of feel along with sight.



Taking into account my experiences as a teacher, I would like to share some techniques and tips that I at **Colours of Innocence** have adopted in dealing with its students.

Classes are conducted with the idea of giving the children a free will, with certain guidelines to follow which is to help them create more effectively.

They are made to think more for themselves than to copy. Old masters are studied and it is encouraged to emulate the techniques more than the subject itself.

Imagination along with group work is initiated.

For e.g. We had a lesson plan wherein children created and painted imaginary characters. To take it a step further they even dressed up as their own characters. Later they got together to come up with a story based on these imaginary beings which was enacted into a play by them.

Also they are made to view works by other artists, whether through books, internet or ongoing exhibitions. It is encouraged that they borrow ideas from what they have seen to use in their own work.

Sketch or quickly jot down anything that they like whether in class or outdoors.

Another important aspect to learning is taking out a few moments to review what one has created. Children are made to talk about their work, what it depicts, their thoughts behind it, their use of colour and it is an open house for any other student to make suggestions on improvement or appreciate what they like.



My sincere advise to all those who are reading this article is creativity has to be nurtured and allowed to grow not regulated. There is no perfect way to draw or paint and we as their guides should aim at children creating their own individual styles and being confident not only of their art work but also of themselves. This confidence can only come in when they are taking their own little decisions on the choices they make whether its colour , medium, subject etc. without being rebuked for it.



A warm day painted by a 3 year old.

To understand the role of art further in childrens everyday lives, lets read what some parents have to say:

I would like to quote a few words by Mrs. Sangeetha Gupta, parent of an eight year old girl,

“ We give crayons to our kids when they are barely two but formal art classes at a young age, in my view do have a positive and lasting impact on the evolution of children. My daughter started art classes with Deepshikha when she was 4 or 5 and today at 8+ I see a distinct mark of this class on her overall personality.

For her, drawing anything comes naturally it may not be perfect but her strokes are always bold and confident and there’s never a ‘No’ to drawing

anything, infact she prefers to draw rather than paste pictures downloaded from the net.

Independence of thought has also been skillfully inculcated in her and this is evident not only in her drawings which are never the same as she does in class but in various decisions made by her appropriate to her age.

The impression of colours is another lasting mark which I can see in my daughter. She is very comfortable with and confident about colours not only in her drawings but also in her clothes, accessories or other belongings that she chooses and is specific about.

The moulding of my daughter through ‘Art’ is constant and Deepshikha, as her art teacher, has a very important role to play in it.”

Another view point by a parent, Mrs. Neetika Swarup,

“ A child who did not want to draw anything now preferred to sit and sketch, draw and paint. The visual languages have now become a part of her daily life.

The beauty of a birds colour, the flowers in the garden even the structure of a building have become a part of my daughter. Creativity today holds immense importance in the world of all information available on your fingertips to be able to make – to get inspired is very essential and I have seen this become a part of Siddhika.”

Certain changes in behaviour that I would like to bring forth is often one sees children emerge out of their shell, those who are extremely shy come out to speak and discuss their art in class. Also the openness to adapt to new thought and doing away with pre-conceived ideas is stirred.

I would like to conclude this article in the words of Confucius, which best explain the role of art in human life.

“What I hear, I forget.

What I see, I remember.

What I do, I understand.”

- Confucius

DEEPSHIKHA KHAITAN is an artist currently living and working in Kolkata. She helps children appreciate art and gives them an understanding of its history. Her students' first exhibition 'Colours of Innocence' got an overwhelming response. Her other interests include designing book covers, the last of which got published, "Bridges", by Sivasankari. She can be contacted at: khaitandk@gmail.com

My Perspective



N.R. Pradeep
Professional artist and
Visual Art teacher
at Oaktree International
School, Kolkata
E-mail: pradeepnr@gmail.com

My USP to generate interest in art stems from a simple understanding that art is within you as good as it is around you. I have adopted the method of making the student understand, respect and experience the values and ethics of the process of art and culminating this whole process into a product. The best method to start art with any young budding minds is sand art or a collage using wastes around you. I have personally seen a tremendous positive impact on the young minds in being interested in art through this activity. They get very enthused to innovate and create expressions using the stuff they see around. This helps them improve their creativity and also to realize that art needs no specific tool to express. Another important aspect is to provide freedom. Art is not defined without freedom of expression. I encourage giving direction to an artist's mind rather than limiting and drawing horizons to his flow of thoughts. I encourage learning and teaching all different media and styles to encourage every student to learn, understand, practice and develop their own individual style and identity without any bias induced by me. The practice is done both on an individual and group wise to induce collaborative spirit and exchange of ideas.

I am glad and very proud to share that Kim Jin Moo (my student) from South Korea has taken up art as a profession.

Art teaches you to observe, meditate, ponder, search, create and express your thoughts on an issue which sharpens any young mind to be an individual who will be prepared to meet the technical, analytical and mental challenges in their personal and professional lives. These attributes are essential in any sphere of life or profession which makes the learning easier and interesting for folks learnt in art. Art also teaches you to see things in a different way and to give new dimension to your thinking. This helps in understanding and dealing with the problems in a creative way and this attribute is essential in everybody's life. I see and urge art to be included as a serious subject in the curriculum to help students be better individuals for tomorrow.